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The Religion of Christ

in the

Twentieth Century

"The Christian Religion has been tried for eighteen centuries; the Religion of Christ remains to be tried."—LESSING.

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PREFACE

WE hear much to-day of the "New Theology" and,—in Germany, in France, in England, in America,—many works of great interest and value are contributing toward the evolution of a truer *speaking about God.*

The purpose of this little book is far more humble. It makes no pretence to philosophical argument or definition. It has to do solely with the consideration of what constitutes, among the religions of the world, the distinctively Christian expression of that feeling after God if haply he may be found which is the root of all religion, and which has found expression in many and varied theologies.

As the years of this new century unroll, the familiar question "What *is* Christianity?" presses with ever increasing insistence upon those of us—and we are a great company—

whose main business is, not to argue or to define, but simply to live, and who seek a religion to live by. What, then, in all truth, was the *Religion of Christ*, the religion of him who has for nineteen centuries borne the title of the Anointed of God?—and is it a religion by which we so-called Christians of the twentieth century may wisely seek to live? The following pages attempt to answer these questions in the spirit of the seeker, and are related to theology only in so far as it may be held true that he who sincerely seeks to do the will shall know sufficient of the doctrine.

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"Thou art my Son,

"This day have I begotten thee:

as he saith also in another place,

"Thou art a priest for ever

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"After the order of Melchizedek.

"Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became unto all them that obey him the author of eternal salvation, named of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek."—*The Epistle to the Hebrews.*

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The Religion of Christ in the Twentieth Century

I

THE NEW VOICES

"There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and no kind is without signification."—*The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians.*

IT has been truly said that every age is a middle age, and every time a time of transition. The sundry and manifold changes of the world never cease; mankind is powerless to hold itself at one point of view, and, with the varying point of view, the old things forever become new, and "nothing endures without being transformed."

But there are many reasons why we who

live in these early years of the twentieth century should think of our own time as in an unusual degree a time of transition ; why we should be especially aware of the intellectual and spiritual changes going on about us, especially conscious of their character and extent. For the expression of these changes meets us at every turn and knows no let nor hindrance. In all ages the great souls have attained freedom of thought and freedom of speech — and have taken the consequences of this attainment, the cup of hemlock, the cross, the stake,—but in no age before our own has such freedom of thought and speech been possible for all souls, both great and small. And, though in all ages there have been those whose sensitive hearing caught the prophesying voices about them and recognised their signification, in no age before our own have these voices been so assured of finding, on every side, ears to hear. The enormous increase of general information, and the free discussion of all matters ethical and religious, have led to their inevitable result, and the

whole reading and thinking world is aware that the last half-century has brought about changes in religious thought bewildering in their rapidity and extent.

Is it really less than a hundred years since the left wing of the Christian Church, itself but grudgingly accorded the Christian name, cast forth Theodore Parker for his assertion that the value of the gospel of Jesus Christ did not stand or fall with the credibility of its miraculous elements? It is a far cry, indeed, from those days to the days when it is the Dean of the Faculty of Protestant Theology in the University of Paris who observes: "The most conservative apologists of the traditional school confess to-day that miracle has lost its evidential force"[1]; and when it is the Professor of Church History in the University of Berlin who declares,

"Miracles do not happen," and "He who uttered the words, 'Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe,' cannot have held that belief in the signs and wonders which he wrought was the right or only avenue

[1] Auguste Sabatier: *The Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit.*

to the recognition of his person and his mission. . . . The question of miracles is of relative indifference in comparison with everything else which is to be found in the Gospel. It is not miracles that matter." [1]

And what has become of the once familiar conflict between Religion and Science? Huxley's encounter with the Bishop reads like ancient history. The ranks of the combatants "are breaking like thin clouds before a Biscay gale," and many of these combatants appear to have possessed themselves of their opponents' banners, and to be shouting their opponents' rallying cries. Here one beholds a company in orthodox array apparently leading the attack on tradition; there, above the heads of a group of free-thinkers, waves a banner singularly like one formerly in the hands of the apologists for religion. We turn from Professor Harnack's *What is Christianity?* or Sabatier's *Religions of Authority and the Religion of the Spirit*, to Kidd's *Social Evolution* or James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*, and wonder where the conflict is.

[1] Adolf Harnack: *What is Christianity?*—Lecture II.

If we want the old uncompromising defence of religion *against* science we must look—heaven save the mark!—to W. H. Mallock,—to some such book as his *Religion as a Credible Doctrine.*

The truth is that we have all had to move on. The leaders of thought have been shifting their ground and taking up new positions, and the rest of us, willingly or unwillingly, have had to follow. And it looks as if we should have to keep on following. For the changes are mainly due to increased information, and information continues to pour in on every side. The deafness of our ignorance is being cured whether we will or no; and, with whatever emotions we listen, listen we must.

That the emotions should vary greatly is inevitable. When the Israelites before Jericho heard the trumpet-blast, they shouted with a great shout, for to them it was the trumpet of the Lord. But a woeful sound that trumpet-call must have been to those who had sought shelter within the swaying walls. Even so, as the walls of the theological Jericho sway

beneath the stress of the new voices, those within the citadel must needs hear with dismay. And not they alone. There are many thoughtful men and women to-day who, while not greatly concerned for the dogmatic ramparts themselves, are yet troubled in heart as they behold their disintegration. Touched by the mood of *Dover Beach*, they can hear only "the melancholy long-withdrawing roar" of the sea of faith. They are fearful lest the passing of Christian dogmatism may mean also the passing of the Christian religion; lest Christianity may have "forfeited its privilege to be an eternal religion" by "entangling itself with a particular account of matters of fact, matters irrelevant to its ideal signification."[1] Such hearers listen and fear. Others, again, listen and rejoice, believing that it is the "Religion of the Spirit," and not irreligion which is breaking down the "Religions of Authority"; and holding that "if, as every educated person now thinks, there is a considerable human element in all doctrine, and the light of the

[1] George Santayana: *Poetry and Religion*, chap. iv.

idea shines through an earthly setting, it is of the utmost importance to study the human conditions which lay around the cradle of the faith,"[1] for the very purpose of saving Christianity by thus *dis*entangling it from "matters irrelevant to its ideal signification."

But, whether we listen sorrowfully, or whether we listen gladly, still we must listen. The very newspapers force the voices upon our attention. He must run fast, indeed, for instance, who misses the signification of the news from the Scotch churches. Whether or not we "find in this cruel blow which has staggered the Free Church, the punishment that, sooner or later, visits those who do not manfully speak out their minds, but are content to go on seeming to be bound by an outworn creed"[2]; whether or not we think this, of one thing we may rest assured,—that the legal decision in favour of the heroic remnant, steadfast to the old covenant, is proving more hostile to tradition than volumes of skeptical attack, declaring,

[1] Percy Gardner: *Exploratio Evangelica.*

[2] Augustine Birrell: "Sad Case of the Free Church of Scotland," *Independent Review.*

as it does, that this old covenant is a covenant unto death, pointing, as it does, to the need of a new covenant, not of the letter, but of the spirit; "written not with ink, but with the spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in tables that are hearts of flesh."[1]

One is tempted to continue with the Apostle:

"Having therefore such a hope, we use great boldness of speech, and are not as Moses, who put a veil upon his face, that the children of Israel should not look steadfastly on the end of that which was passing away: but their minds were hardened: for until this very day at the reading of the old covenant the same veil remaineth unlifted; which veil is done away in Christ. But unto this day whensoever Moses is read, a veil lieth upon their heart. But whensoever it shall turn to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."

The liberty of the twentieth century may find in these familiar words a new meaning. Is it true that the veil which has been put upon the things which to-day are passing away is done away in Christ? Is the *life* still the light of men?

[1] 2 Cor., chap. iii.

For it would seem to be more and more a question of the *life*. It would seem as if Christianity were losing the protection of dogmatic metaphysics and must live, if it live at all, by the help of no extraneous supports, but by its own inherent vitality; must endure, if it endure at all, as a religion not proved true by theological argument, but proving itself true in the lives of individuals and of nations. Neither eighteenth-century skepticism nor nineteenth-century scientific research was, in truth, as profoundly hostile to dogmatism, to intellectualism in religion, as is that hunger of the spirit which in this new century is revealing itself in a hundred ways, ways often as apparently antagonistic as the irony of the free-thinker and the preaching of the revivalist. It is a hunger which will not be satisfied with husks; hence the growing demand for reality and not a sham, for bread and not a stone, for a living religion and not a dying theology. No intellectual creed, however well-mortised, no dream, however beautiful, can meet this demand; it can be met only

by a religion based on human experience and living with the truth of human life.

Is Christianity capable of meeting this new demand as it has met like demands in the past? The Christianity that we know is composed of many and diverse elements, and certain of these elements, important in the past, are apparently passing away; does it contain other elements which are enduring, and which are destined to reassert themselves, with greater power than ever before, in a religion of practical value to struggling, suffering, hoping humanity? It is a question for the coming years to decide, but we may take heart in one thought; that, whatever ethical and religious changes this century holds in its dim reaches, any possible revival of Christianity will not be obliged to formulate its creed, as earlier creeds were formulated, to protect a nascent church struggling to maintain a foothold against the assaults of alien metaphysics without and unruly sectaries within,—intellectual compromises demanded as the very price of existence. A new creed must meet de-

mands no less insistent, but demands of the soul rather than of the intellect. It must be a creed not to reason about in councils, but to live by in the home; a creed to be justified, not by logic, but by life; not by argument, but by experience. Would such a creed be a new creed after all? Might it not prove to be a creed older than the Athanasian, older than the Nicene, older even than the Apostles'?

"And one of the scribes came and heard them questioning together and knowing that he had answered them well, asked him, What commandment is the first of all? Jesus answered, The first is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord, is one: and thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. The second is this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these."[1]

The Jewish scribe to whom Jesus gave this "rule of faith" was disarmed by it. Has it lost its power through the labours of Christian scribes? Dean Stanley has some plain words in this connection.

[1] Mark xii., 28–31.

"To erect hedges round the gospel has been the effort —happily not continuous or uniform but of large and dominant sections of the Scribes of Christianity—until the words of its Founder have well-nigh disappeared behind the successive entrenchments and fences and outposts and counterworks of Councils and Synods and Popes and Antipopes, and Sums of Theology and Saving Doctrine, of Confessions of Faith and Schemes of Salvation, and the world has again and again sighed for one who would speak with the authority of self-evidencing truth and not as the Scribes." [1]

The authority of self-evidencing truth—that is what the twentieth century wants. And it may well be that, as the obstructions fashioned by the scribes melt away in the breath of that scientific spirit which cares only for such truth,—for the truth of experience,—we shall hear with increasing clearness the voice of him who spoke with this authority.

And if this prove so, shall we *again* fulfil the prophecy of Isaiah, and, hearing, in no wise understand? I have a better faith in the process of the suns. There is a little parable in Mark—Mark is not rich in parables, but this one is its peculiar treasure—which,

[1] *The Jewish Church*, vol. iii., p. 166.

though very simple, is still, after nineteen centuries, revealing to the Christian world its profound meaning.

"And he said, So is the kingdom of God, as if a man should cast seed upon the earth; and should sleep and rise night and day, and the seed should spring up and grow he knoweth not how. The earth beareth fruit of herself; first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. But when the fruit is ripe, straightway he putteth forth the sickle, because the harvest is come." [1]

If the seed sown nineteen hundred years ago has in truth sprung up and grown, we know not how, through humanity's sleeping and waking hours, until now the husks, and the husks alone, are falling from the ripened fruit, then every honest attempt, however humble, to distinguish between husk and fruit becomes worth while.

This is my only excuse for this little book. A poor enough excuse it may seem for a book, however little, which, in the present prodigality of "new thought," makes no pretence to offer any new thought whatever; which, on the contrary, owes its existence to the conviction

[1] Mark iv., 26–29.

that it is not a new thought that we need, but a very old one; a thought not hidden from us nor far off, that we should say, who shall go over the sea or up to heaven for us, to bring it to us, but a thought very nigh unto us, in our mouth, and in our heart, that we may do it!

That we may do it. Not talk about it, but do it. Not accept it with our lips, but test it with our lives.

"We live in an age of theories," says Dr. Bigg in the valuable and delightful little introduction to his translation of the *Confessions of St. Augustine;* "we live in an age of theories which come and go, ending in mere denials and divisions. Unity will cease to be no more than a golden dream in proportion as man comes to see in theory a thing to be worked out, to be applied thoroughly and consistently to the facts of life. If you believe a thing, Materialism, Socialism, whatever it may be, go and do it; preach it and act it without scruple and without compromise. Do not wait for others or serve the times. If your theory will not work, note carefully the point where it breaks down, cast it away at once, and try another. There is no truth for him that is not true to himself."

There is much in those few sentences worth pondering upon by twentieth-century Christains. They are the plain expression of the

working of the modern scientific spirit in the domain of religion. Yet Doctor Bigg can add, and add truly, "Perhaps this may be called the final lesson of the *Confessions*, and indeed of all Christian experience." *There is no truth for him who is not true to himself.* St. Augustine believed that with all his heart. So, too, did Thomas Huxley. Both these men saw in theory "a thing to be worked out, to be applied thoroughly and consistently to the facts of life," and, as Doctor Bigg points out, all hope of unity depends upon the degree in which the mass of us are able to follow the method of these clear and sincere minds, and in our thinking, to get back to the *facts of life*, and to be faithful to them. Christendom is very conscious to-day of its lack of religious unity, and much is said of the need of maintaining and setting forward, as much as lieth in us, quietness, peace, and love among all Christian people. And, among the signs of this time, there are many which suggest that there is a more reasonable hope than has ever existed before that this golden dream of

unity, of *essential* unity, may be in some measure realised. For surely it is no dream that the old fierce sectarianism is dying out; the sectarianism which made each one of us primarily a member of a Christian sect, and secondarily a Christian; surely it is no dream that the many partition walls in the Christian temple are wearing somewhat thinner. Such a circumstance as the peaceable passing over of the Brookfield church, *as a church*, from one form of Christian worship to another is not without signification, and there are many minor signs of a like nature that there is a growing tendency to transfer the emphasis from that which separates the sects to that which unites them. We are apparently learning at last that the only form of religious unity possible or desirable is one based on the recognition that there are in all forms of religion elements essential and elements non-essential, and that if we could but agree upon the essential, we need not greatly concern ourselves about the non-essential.

If we could but agree upon the essential—

there, of course, is the rub. Yet, again, there are signs of the time which suggest that some such agreement is not quite so far out of reach, not quite such a "golden dream," as it has seemed to be in past years. Negatively, if not positively, a Christian theory is being *worked out*, based, not on the authority of special revelation, but on the *facts of life*, and in such a working out lies, to go back to Doctor Bigg, the only sure hope of ultimate Christian unity. Consider, for example, the signification of the correspondence carried on about a year ago in the columns of the *Daily Telegraph* and since republished—in part—in book form, under the title, *Do We Believe?*

The original letter which gave rise to the correspondence was published not long before the opening of the Church Congress of 1904, and is addressed to that large company whose Christianity—whose "belief"—is assumed by such a congress. "But," the writer asks, "do we believe? and if so, what? Are we all Christians, and, if so, in what sense of that ambiguous term?" There was an interesting review of

this book in the *Spectator* for March 25, 1905, a review which amounted to a summing up of the results of this extensive correspondence. After disposing of "what may be called for convenience the unintellectual letters—those, that is to say, whose writers show little cultivation and little familiarity with what has been said by the educated, on both sides of the matter at issue," the reviewer goes to consider the "writings of reasonable men."

"Few," he observes, "even among those who profess faith could successfully pass what we might call an Early Victorian test of orthodoxy. Faith is generally taken to mean confidence in God as He was revealed in Christ, and the essential difference between belief and knowledge is seldom forgotten. Almost all admit tacitly or explicitly that unless the Church will comprehend those believers whose creeds are shorter than any formulary of any Christian sect, her numbers will be woefully small. The following extract from one of the letters expresses roughly the religious position of very many writers:—'I believe in one God only, who is to me a friend, long-suffering and of great kindness. . . . For forms and creeds I care not one jot.' That such a God was revealed by Christ and by him alone is regarded as certain, and the letter throws a curious sidelight upon those somewhat puzzling words of our Lord: 'No man cometh unto the Father, but by me.' . .

"Taking the letters as a whole what is to be gathered from them? Let us imagine that we have no means of judging of the present religious position of England but that afforded us by the correspondence we have been reading. Three points strike us as we lay down the book, —that among the thoughtful, Christian morals are not theoretically questioned, that belief in dogma is very much shaken, and that atheism is dying or dead."

Mark that last. That atheism is dying or dead, that belief in dogma is very much shaken, but that "among the thoughtful, Christian morals are not theoretically questioned." In this conclusion we find the suggestion of a possible basis of agreement among Christian people, a suggestion, that is, as to the nature of the essential and non-essential elements in Christianity. And, at this point, we find ourselves carried back from England in the twentieth century to Germany in the eighteenth, for much the same suggestion is offered by Lessing's paradox, "The Christian Religion has been tried for eighteen centuries, and the Religion of Christ remains to be tried," only that Lessing's words further suggest, by implication, that it may be at least partially due

to preoccupation with the non-essential elements that greater emphasis has not hitherto been thrown upon the essential; and that this preoccupation is in accordance with the natural development of human thought,—first the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. This point of view is, of course, familiar enough nowadays, but just because it is so, because, as a point of view, possible and desirable, it is, as it were, on trial to-day,—such words as these of Lessing's gain an added significance and would seem worth the consideration of all who have at heart the hope of Christian unity.

This is why I would call renewed attention to them. It is far from my wish to argue this point or that, far from my wish to argue at all. Arguments as to the nature of Christianity are within easy reach of all who wish for them. Students in every land are faithfully seeking to penetrate the obscurity of Christian origins; and to trace freely and reverently the whole history of Christianity, external and internal. If one is in need of evidence in these matters he need only hold out his hand

for books in which such evidence is carefully and honestly discussed by the learned. I, who am not learned, have a much humbler object. There are many thoughtful men and women to-day—or so, at least, it seems to me—who are puzzled by the new voices, and doubtful of their signification; who are confused and troubled between their reverence for truth and their conviction that it is by faith we live. In sympathy with this attitude of mind, I seek only to present, as simply and briefly as possible, the point of view suggested by Lessing's words. I do not assert—these things are so. Rather I ask—are not these things so?

Says the late Auguste Sabatier in the introduction to that book to which he devoted the last months of his life:

> "No one has a right to impose a doctrine or the presumption surely to dictate to others how they must direct their thought; but a sincere and persuaded mind may tell how it has directed its own, and may set forth as an experience and a document the views at which it has arrived."

It is in this spirit, and in this spirit alone, that I would turn back to Lessing's words, and

speak of *the Christian Religion* and *the Religion of Christ* as the one and the other appears at the beginning of this new century, to one who has not found *the Religion of Christ* the exclusive possession of any of the numerous sects professing *the Christian Religion.*

The Christian Religion.—When we speak the familiar phrase what idea does it call up? I should answer that it called up a combination of several ideas; the idea of a body of doctrine and the idea of an ecclesiastical organisation, and, as an adjunct to these, the idea of a way of life. Whether the idea of a body of doctrine comes to the fore, as in Evangelicanism; or whether the idea of an ecclesiastical organisation comes to the fore, as in Sacramentalism; the idea of a way of life remains an adjunct, distinctly not the one thing necessary. And, yet, if I understand Lessing aright, this way of life was to him *the Religion of Christ.*

Now, where a phrase calls up several ideas at once, there is manifest danger of vagueness in its use. To avoid this danger as far as pos-

sible, it may be well to consider separately the nature of the Christian body of doctrine and the nature of the Christian ecclesiastical organisation, in their relation to the Christian way of life.

Such consideration must necessarily be slight and inadequate, since—let me say it once more—I am speaking, not from the point of view of the student, but from the point of view of the average thinking man and woman. "Be it indeed that I have erred, mine error remaineth with myself." But I am encouraged in the attempt to speak from this average point of view, by the reflection that, after all, it is by average experience and average intelligence that the practical value of any point of view must ultimately be tested.

II

DOGMA

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past tracing out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?"—*The Epistle of Paul to the Romans.*

FIRST, then, what is the nature of the Christian body of doctrine, of Christian dogma? How did it come to be? and what has been, and is, its relation to the Christian way of life?

As I look back to the last three or four centuries of Roman dominion, that is, to the first three or four centuries of what we call the Christian era, I see the strangest mental admixture which history has ever recorded. I see wholly diverse systems of thought brought into contact by the cohesive power of Roman civilisation; I see the state religion of the Empire, a body without a soul, tolerating,

with the toleration of indifference, rationalism on the one hand, and, on the other, a host of fantastic cults crowding into the Empire from the mysterious East. I see the whole lighted by the glory — though a fading glory — of Greek philosophy, and dominated by the Greek habit of mind, the essentially dogmatic habit; a habit of mind which applied the methods of logic as confidently to metaphysical as to physical matters.[1] I see ignorance and superstition and vice; I see also knowledge and earnestness and virtue; the wildest debauchery and the loftiest renunciation: I see the human spirit restless, eager, dissatisfied, forever seeking a new thing, conscious that the life has passed from the ancient forms of religion, and crying, consciously or unconsciously—Who shall deliver us from the body of this death?

I see these things, and I see, scattered throughout this mighty Empire,—so solidly organised in material things, so chaotic in

[1] See on this point Edwin Hatch's Hibbert Lectures for 1888, *The Influence of Greek Ideas and Usages upon the Christian Church;* especially Lect. V., Christianity and Greek Philosophy.

spirit, — the so-called Jewish Dispersion ; groups of men and women drawn from an alien nation, a nation conquered and yet unconquerable, a people in their narrowness and intolerance and strange blending of bitter arrogance and servile meanness repellant to the pagan world ; and yet a people profoundly attractive to this same world in their genuine and intense religious feeling, in their unshakable faith in one only God ; a people whose history was all religious, whose literature was all sacred.

And I see in the midst of this dispersed people, and extending from them, a living spiritual principle silently taking root, a *living* principle because it was actually lived, a mustard seed dropped into ground torn and tossed by the iron ploughs of doubt, discouragement, and despair. I see little communities appearing here and there, containing not many wise after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble ; communities very human in their failures and dissensions, but held together by the inward power of this new principle of life, by

this revelation of God in man. I see the leaven of this revelation steadily working into the surrounding mass until these small and despised communities become a force to be reckoned with; until contemptuous indifference turns into no less contemptuous disapproval; until the State, realising that this is more than a question among the Jews about words and names and their own law, is, at last, minded to be a judge in these matters [1] and to suppress by force this "deadly superstition" [2]—and behold, the blood of the martyrs waters the growing plant.

I see the living principle expand and strengthen and take into itself element after element from the world about it until at length the absorption is complete, and we find—what? the religion of Jesus dominating the pagan world? I cannot see this. What I see is a great church, Roman in body, Greek in spirit, but a living church, because at its heart endures the spiritual principle which gave life to the first community at Jerusalem. Gladly

[1] Acts xviii., 14, 15. [2] Tacitus.

do I recognise this, gladly do I find the Christian gospel back of the Christian creed; otherwise the spectacle of the Roman Emperor on his low golden seat at the Council of Nice would be a disheartening spectacle indeed; otherwise the bitter enmity, the personal hatred, the fierce strife, which finally wrought out the Christian creed established by this Council, would make it appear but a mockery of *the Religion of Christ;* would make of the Sermon on the Mount only a beautiful unreality, a fading dream.

The story is in many respects what Harnack calls it, a "gruesome" one, but all the mists of controversy about the symbols of faith did not, and could not, extinguish the light of the faith itself, even in the councils of the Church; and looking back over the period of the evolution of this Church, from the days when the little band of disciples continued steadfastly with one accord in the temple at Jerusalem, praising God, and awaiting the return of their Master, to the days when Constantine, a son of this world wise for his own generation, ac-

cepted the name of Christian, I, for one, do not see how the story could have been different. First, the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. The principle of life must animate some form, the kernel must have a protecting husk. Those who had seen the revelation itself might be indifferent to intellectual statements about it, but the loose communism of the first few years was possible only to a few eager souls, rapt away from the necessities of this life by the absorbing expectation of another, of a kingdom of heaven which was immediately to be established.

As time went on, organisation became a necessity, and the struggle for existence began. Without were fightings, within were fears. Gallantly did the growing Church hold its own, but, inevitably, as it grew, its character altered. It could live only by assimilation, and assimilation means compromise. As converted Jews had used the weapons of Jewish thought —Paul, of course, the preëminent instance of this — so, later, converted pagans used the weapons of pagan thought, and the attacks of

subtle logic without were met by the defence of subtle logic within. At every turn we may see what Sabatier calls "the revenge of the Greek mind upon the Apostolic preaching."

And while the outside world was thus gradually conquered by assimilation, a ceaseless internal struggle was going on. The Christian way of life was one, the Christian ways of thought were many. One after another these ways were advanced and debated until, by the pressure of heresy after heresy, that way of thought was moulded which was finally pronounced orthodox, and "the Church no longer disputed with heretics; she condemned them."

Then there befell what always befalls under like circumstances. As soon as the Church had attained a position of authority, she met with the support always accorded to such authority by that "old and almost ineradicable tendency of mankind to rid itself of its freedom and responsibility in higher things, and to subject itself to a law."[1] That direct personal relation to God and His truth which is the

[1] Adolf Harnack: *What is Christianity?* Lecture vii.

birthright of every human soul, this human soul again and again exchanges, and exchanges gladly, for the comforting pottage of mental quiet and freedom from responsibility. It is easier to repeat a creed than to follow after truth, and willingly enough did the laity give the keys of life and death into the hands of a mediatorial Church.

Once again,—the more I observe the working of the laws in accordance with which the human mind acts, and the more I study the history external and internal of the early Christian centuries, the more impossible it seems to me that Christianity should have developed on any other lines ; and though I cannot picture to myself Jesus of Nazareth at the Council of Nice, yet I find nothing strange in the spectacle of the Christian Church in the fourth century with its stiffening organisation and its increasing body of doctrine.

A wonderful story is the story of that Church from this time on ; with its gradual rise to imperial power and to the mastery of Europe ; a story of intellectual ability, of heroic

achievement, of passionate devotion. But is it the story of the poor in spirit and the pure in heart? of the meek and the peacemaker? Is it the story of the hunger and thirst after righteousness? Does the record of "religious" controversies, "religious" persecutions, "religious" wars, declare with Jesus that all religion is comprised in the love of God and man? Is this the record of the faith that worketh through love? What is it that all these statesmen, lawyers, soldiers, doctors, saints, are seeking to make prevail? Is it that kingdom of God which cometh not with observation? or is it a body of doctrine, a set of intellectual formulas?

Let each student of Church history answer for himself. For my own part, though I find in *the Christian Religion* which gradually established itself on the throne of the Cæsars but little outward resemblance to *the Religion of Christ*, I believe it never failed to hold this religion at its heart. Beneath the war-cries of Catholic and Arian and of a host of minor schisms,—one may count a round hundred of

heresies in the course of the first six centuries, —beneath the vituperation of dissentient saints and schoolmen, the clash of arms red with the blood of sectaries, the roar of flames fed on the flesh of heretics, the groans of victims to the Holy Office,—beneath all these may be heard a still small voice; and if the Lord was not in the wind of theological dispute, nor in the earthquake of theological schism, nor in the fire of theological persecution, He was, assuredly, in this still small voice, forever whispering to the soul of struggling humanity that the kingdom of God is not a visible kingdom, but is within us and must be established, if it be established at all, not by might, not by power, but by the spirit of the Lord. Wind and earthquake and fire pass away, but the still small voice endures. The noise of past theological wrangling dies upon indifferent ears, but so long as men and women suffer and love and hope will they keep at heart the words of the obscure monk who believed that "He is truly great that has great love," and of the "poor little one" to whose "great love" the very sun

and moon were as brother and sister. Here indeed is *the Religion of Christ.* Moreover, though humanity wisely treasures the *Imitation of Christ*, and the *Little Flowers of St. Francis*, and leaves to professed theologians Anselm's *Cur Deus Homo?* or St. Bernard's refutations of Abélard ; while it reads with enduring interest the *Confessions* of St. Augustine and is hardly conscious that he wrote volumes against the Manichæans and the Pelagians, yet surely the record of theological controversy is in itself a persistent witness to the greatness of the human spirit. "To meddle in theology," says Jowett, "requires an exceptionally happy nature." Naturally. If we have sought faithfully to imprison in words "the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God," and believe ourselves successful in this attempt, how shall we avoid exasperation with—to use the words of one of the greatest of theologians—"that so great and inveterate disease rooted in the minds of the ignorant, that they will defend their irrational and brutish opinions after that the truth

has been taught them as plain as one man can teach another?"[1]

There is no denying the *odium theologicum*, but no one, I am sure, can study the evolution of Christian dogma without being profoundly impressed with the inextinguishable longing of the human spirit to explain to itself this mysterious universe, and to obtain some firm hold upon abstract truth; with its eternal dissatisfaction with ignorance, its eternal craving for knowledge. This dissatisfaction and craving, this wish "to be as certain of things unseen as that seven and three are ten"[2] is Hellenic, not Hebraic—Job was the one great Hebrew questioner and he was no metaphysician,—but the ideas with which this Greek dogmatic spirit concerned itself were but partially Greek in origin. Mr. Huxley indeed declares that *the Christian Religion* altogether turned its back upon *the Religion of Christ*, permitting it to die out on Jewish soil, stigmatised as a heresy,—"Nazarenism."[3] I cannot see this. It is true that the primary importance which,

[1] Augustine: *The City of God.* [2] Augustine: *Confessions.*
[3] Letter to Mr. Taylor in Huxley's *Life* by his son, vol. ii., p. 243.

from the first, Christianity attached to orthodox belief, to *intellectual salvation*, sufficiently testifies to its Greek training; it is true that when we read the various "Statements of Faith" which the Church gradually worked out in the course of the first centuries of its existence, and concerning which it made the further statement, "This is the Catholic faith, which except a man believe faithfully he cannot be saved," we feel ourselves at a point of view foreign to that of Jesus when he declared that the one thing needful was not to say, "Lord, Lord," but to do the will of the Father. Nevertheless the central figure of these Statements of Faith, of these dogmatic pronouncements, was, and remained, the Christ, "Emmanuel—that is, God with us," and the Church's absorption in proving that Jesus of Nazareth was God did not prevent its careful preservation of the records of his human life. And thus, through centuries of ignorance and brutality, and through centuries of luxury and corruption, did the husk protect the kernel, did the Christian creed enshrine the Christian

gospel. It was very curious, the relation of the creed and the gospel. Nothing in the story is more striking than the apparent contrast between the ideal and the real. As "Christian" Europe emerges into the growing light of the Middle Ages we find it, as Mr. Bryce has told us, "ferocious and sensual, worshipping humility and asceticism," combining "with the purest ideal of love the grossest profligacy of life."[1] And still the ideal endured; still it was not only never destroyed by reality, but was often protected by it in strange and sometimes fantastic ways, as in the institution of chivalry and the fierce ardour of the Crusades. But as the humanising light of the revival of learning diffused itself over Europe, men began to perceive this singularly frank divorce between theory and practice, to perceive it and to seek to remedy it. Remonstrant voices arose here and there, swelling at length into the Grand Remonstrance of the Reformation. It is true that the Reformation, for all its good intentions, did not

[1] James Bryce: *Holy Roman Empire.*

apparently succeed in bringing the Christian life into much closer harmony with the Christian ideal. Münster Anabaptists were hardly more Christian than were drunken monks, and Corporal Grace-be-here Humgudgeon had little more to do with the Sermon on the Mount than had the Bishop of St. Praxed's. It is true that the Reformation apparently succeeded in merely substituting one dogmatic theory for another, and not in reconciling theory and practice, but, in spite of appearances, the Reformation was, in truth, a step, and a long step, toward such reconcilement. For it was in its beginnings, and remained in its essence, a mighty manifestation of that spirit which must *ultimately* refuse allegiance to any theory which is not based on fact; of that spirit the evolution of which began, who shall say when? and is still in process, and of which we have come to speak as the scientific spirit. The scientific spirit is not "the spirit that denies," though it has frequently borne this accusation; but it affirms only on a basis of fact. It does not deny

revelation, but it finds revelation, not outside of nature but in it; and, as it accepts a theory of gravitation, not because it *was* revealed once and for all, at some definite moment of this world's history, but because it *is* revealed by the entire physical universe; so it accepts a theory of religion, not because it *was* revealed from some solitary Sinai, but because it *is* revealed in human life. It does not deny the need of authority, but it finds this authority, not in an arbitrary supernatural pronouncement, local and temporary, but in the accumulated experience of mankind, as discovered to us by history and psychology. The scientific spirit is the spirit that seeks, and as it seeks for the truth of physical law through the correlation of physical fact, so it seeks for the truth of spiritual law through the correlation of spiritual fact. It has no disdain of theory; on the contrary its object is to create theory; but it builds all hypotheses upon experience and tests then by experience, and thus is concerned with the abstract only through the concrete, with the ideal only through the real.

Whether we are, or are not, in sympathy with the scientific spirit, we shall have to put up with it—for the present, at least. For the evolution of humanity since the Dark Ages has been coincident with the evolution of this spirit. As it lay back of the Renaissance and the Reformation, of the skeptical philosophising of the eighteenth century and the physical discoveries of the nineteenth, so it lies back of the present demand for reality, for theories that work, for a religion that carries its own proof, that is revealed, not outside of nature, but in nature. And always and everywhere the scientific spirit has been at work modifying and changing *un*scientific conceptions both material and spiritual, and is still transforming our conception of dogma, as it has transformed our conception of miracle, by an enlarging and deepening process.

Long ago Saint Augustine replied to those "who denied that the invisible God works visible miracles":

"Is not the world a miracle? Nay all the miracles done in the world are less than the world itself, the

heaven and earth and all therein, yet God made them all and after a manner that men cannot conceive nor comprehend. For though these visible miracles of Nature be now no more admired, yet ponder them wisely and they are more admirable than the strangest: for man is a greater miracle than all that he can work." [1]

The scientific spirit has but emphasised the truth of these words; and as the conception of the miracle of the universe with its inviolable law has tended to obliterate the conception of the local miracle with its broken law, so the spectacle of the mind of man, always and everywhere feeling after God if haply it may find Him, and striving to express its thought of God in words,—a spectacle unrolled before us by the scientific spirit,—tends to obliterate the conception of dogma as the whole truth of God imprisoned in a definite formula, growing out of special and limited intellectual conditions.

It would seem as if the long quarrel between those who defend dogma and those who attack it must be drawing to a close; as, on the one hand, an increasing number of those

[1] Augustine: *The City of God*, book 10, chapter xii.

who defend recognise that it is not the whole truth of God which they are defending, but only an attempt to define this truth conditioned by time and place; and as, on the other hand, an increasing number of those who attack recognise that it is indeed the truth of God which these dogmas attempt to define. The most metaphysical of dogmas must, if it endure, be rooted in reality. Take, for example, the dogma of the Trinity. Follow, if you will, the evolution of this dogma through six centuries or more of controversy. Observe the Greek Christians of these centuries struggling to reconcile in some fashion the worship of the Christ and of the somewhat elusive Paraclete, with the determined monotheism of the Hebrew Scriptures; observe them striving to at once satisfy the growing Christology, and to withstand that paganising tendency which was so persistent that it succeeded, against all opposition, in substituting the worship of the saints for the worship of local deities, and which would have gladly accepted three distinct gods; observe the grad-

ual evolution of orthodox belief until it reaches its final expression in that triumphant pæan of metaphysical subtlety, the so-called Athanasian Creed.

On the surface it is not always an edifying spectacle, this evolution. It is not pleasant to read "the torrents of abuse which one saint poured upon another because the one assented to the speculations of the majority, and the other had speculations of his own,"[1] but I do not see how one can attentively study this development without perceiving that back of all this wrangling over a phrase, a word, a letter, lay a constant effort to express a profound spiritual truth; the truth that deity finds manifestation in more than one aspect; that God forever speaks to the heart of man through His Holy Spirit, and that the divine sonship was indeed revealed in the human life of the Man of Nazareth.

And, if we perceive this in regard to purely metaphysical dogma, we must surely perceive it even more clearly where there is a closer relation between the intellectual statement and

[1] Edwin Hatch: Hibbert Lectures.

the facts of life. Take, for example again, a dogma which lies very close to the Christian consciousness, and which has yet proved so difficult of adequate expression that, though many regard it as "the central question of Christianity," the Church has hesitated to confer upon it a final form. I mean the dogma of the Atonement.

Throughout the Christian ages theologians have laboured to evolve some definite theory of the Atonement which should fit smoothly into the whole theological fabric, satisfying at once the demands of Christian logic and the demands of Christian morality; and the story of the changing attitude of theology toward this "central" question throws a flood of light upon the development of Christian thought in general.

It is impossible to trace here the evolution which changed the Atonement from a ransom paid to Satan (a transaction in which the devil was completely "fooled" by God), first to a ransom paid to God, and then to "an equivalent satisfaction" to Divine Justice,—"an ab-

stract fiction created by logic in the name of human penal law,"[1] and still the orthodox doctrine of the Roman Church. It is impossible to follow in detail its further evolution in Protestant theology, until we reach the modern conception of the Atonement, as a *moral process*, which, unlike earlier conceptions, "commends itself to our conscience," a moral process by which man is brought into harmony, into at-one-ment, with the divine laws of the universe. But this may be readily observed,—that the change has been "from a legalist to an ethical conception." In the words of a modern theologian, "The dogma of the Atonement has only to be traced through its successive phases to see a progressive moral evolution," an evolution, the theologian goes on to say, "not yet finished, since its still generally accepted form belongs to a stage of ethical and religious culture that is passing away and will have no place in the purer and more spiritual religion of the future."

[1] Auguste Sabatier in *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought*, an interesting and significant *Theological Symposium*, from which, in this connection, I quote repeatedly.

But while we may feel that this is all true, and while we may be ready to admit that "the Atonement as a dogma rests upon other dogmas that are fast disappearing," that, indeed, these fading dogmas created the various theories, we must surely perceive also that they created them only in the sense that they forced into conformity with themselves whatever explanation was attempted of certain *facts* of human life. The special theory bears indeed "the impress of its age and often of its region," but the vitality of the dogma of which these theories were so many interpretations has been due surely, not to the needs of empty logic, not to purely metaphysical demands, but to the craving of the human soul for some sort of explanation of its own spiritual experiences. So long as men and women *suffer because they love*, will humanity ask itself for some solution of the mystery of redemption.

We may have done with "legal fictions"; we may shrink back horrified before the picture of an angry God placated by an innocent victim, or of a helpless God, unable to forgive

until the "obstacle of sin" has been vicariously removed; we may be learning to take a more inward view; to perceive that "sin is not an offence committed, but an attitude of mind," so that all atonement must take place within us and not without; and that true sacrifice is "not an expiation, but a spontaneous manifestation of love and faith,"— that it is mercy and not sacrifice which is required of us: but still it remains the fact of history that "to accomplish good among men and women means to suffer with and for them"; that "the world becomes delivered from the burden of its sin and misery by the innocent and devoted love of those who charge themselves with it": and still it remains the fact of daily experience that sin often brings its keenest suffering to the pure in heart, and that "all love pays a ransom proportioned to its intensity and devotion." And since these things are so, it still remains the task of theology to offer some explanation of these facts, that she may reconcile, not God to man, as the Christian Article puts it, but man to God. May she not be enabled to do

this through her growing perception that the moral law is not "an instrument of punishment" but "a means of spiritual development"? Certainly she need not despair of her task so long as she can oppose to the mystery of suffering the still greater mystery of love.

As I stand before Sargent's representation of the Atonement and look on the three lifeless faces of the Trinity, impassive, hard, repellent, on the figure of the dead Christ, with its suggestions of physical torture and defeat, on the dull, unhopeful human faces on either side, I feel that not all its decorative beauty, not all its splendour of line and colour can make it other than the dead picture of a dead dogma. Who will paint for us, not the dying dogma of the Atonement, but the living idea of atonement,—of the redeeming power of love? Who will paint for us that Christ who was the incarnation of this idea, and "who became the Redeemer of the world by making every man a Redeemer"? Looking upon such a picture of atoning love,—of love triumphant,—we might

come to a better understanding of the thought which found expression in the words—

"He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied."

The dogma of the Atonement is passing, but atonement as a "fact of life" remains; and what is true of this dogma is surely true of the whole body of Christian doctrine. "The spirit searches all things, yea, the deep things of God," but the human intellect, dependent upon narrow and superficial logic, in vain attempts to give permanent form to the truth which is revealed to the spirit; and the outward expression must decay even as the inward meaning is renewed.

At the heart of every dogmatic statement lies a living truth which it has striven more or less successfully to express, but history and criticism are revealing more and more plainly, day by day, the purely human origin of such dogmatic statements; and by so doing are necessarily weakening their hold upon the human intelligence. What is of far more moment,—for no one need quarrel with dogma except in so far

as its acceptance is made obligatory,—they are weakening the hold of such statements upon the human conscience. Indeed I think it would be generally admitted to-day, that the present hold of dogma is due, not so much to its power to satisfy the mind and heart of man, as to the fact that it has become "entrenched in a creed, which is entrenched in an ecclesiasticism which again is entrenched in the love and veneration of multitudes of men and women."[1] These words of Dr. Munger tell us a valuable truth about the Christian body of doctrine to-day; the truth that it is mainly the relation of dogma to ecclesiasticism, of the creed to the church, which, amid the disintegrating forces at present at work, still secures to this body of doctrine the protection of those powerful guardians,—the love and veneration of humanity.

And this brings us to ask concerning Christian ecclesiasticism, as we have asked concerning Christian dogma, What is its nature? How did it come to be? And what is its relation to the Christian way of life?

[1] Theodore Munger in *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought.*

III

ECCLESIASTICISM

"In that day shall a man look unto his Maker, and his eyes shall have respect to the Holy One of Israel. And he shall not look to the altars, the work of his hands, neither shall he have respect to that which his fingers have made."—*The Prophet Isaiah.*

DOGMA entrenched in creed, and creed in ecclesiasticism, and ecclesiasticism in the love and veneration of multitudes of men and women. How is a creed possible without dogma? and how is a church possible without a creed? and how is religion possible without a church? Such questions as these are frequently asked to-day, and with increasing anxiety, by many of those who perceive that the authority of dogma, the first link in the chain, is being steadily weakened by the action of historical research and criticism. The anxiety is natural enough, especially to that large portion of Christendom to whom the

Church not only stands for religion, but is religion, so that labour for the Church means labour for religion, faithfulness to the Church means faithfulness to religion, love of the Church means love of religion. To most of us indeed the phrase, *the Christian Religion*, calls up no more surely the idea of a body of doctrine than it calls up the idea of an ecclesiastical organisation. History has much to teach us concerning the Christian body of doctrine; what has it to teach us concerning the Christian ecclesiastical organisation?

A visible church must be bound together by some degree of observance as well as by some degree of conviction. The history of the first three centuries A.D., shows us the rapid development of the external side of *the Christian Religion*, and the history of all the centuries since shows us that this outward bond of observance is far more to be counted upon for the maintenance of a firm ecclesiasticism than is the inward bond of personal conviction. The Church which gradually established itself in those first centuries and which, throwing an in-

creasing emphasis on ritual, finally declared that salvation lay in its sacraments, and, by placing the administration of these sacraments in the hands of a consecrated order, drew a hard and fast line between clergy and laity and constituted itself "the instrument of salvation," is still, in spite of the serious schisms of the ninth and sixteenth centuries, one Church, consistent and powerful, holding in its communion some two hundred and forty million souls, nearly half the Christians in the world. Whereas that portion of this Church which broke away from the main body on the ground of personal conviction, and which trusted to conviction as its main bond of union, has continued so to break up within its own lines that it has never been able to present a solid front. It is obvious enough why this should be so. Plainly, observance is always cohesive in its effect, whereas conviction is quite as likely to be disintegrating; plainly, too, it is far easier for ecclesiastical authority to control outward conformity than inward opinion; but I am inclined to think that the chief reason why ecclesiasticism

finds in *observance* its best support, is the simple one that average humanity takes very kindly to observance.

Apart from the general human tendency to shirk intellectual responsibility, it is undeniably easier to hold fast to the tangible than to the intangible, and thence arises the almost universal dependence upon symbol in one form or another. The soul, shut up in a body of flesh with its eager and dominating senses, finds it very hard to keep a firm hold upon the immaterial, and has recourse to many and varied material helps. Among the ancient religions the Hebrew stands alone in its distrust of symbol, and the frank love of symbol which Christian ecclesiasticism showed from the first was not, it is needless to remark, derived from Palestine. Everywhere throughout the Jewish Scriptures we perceive the spiritually-minded struggling to counteract the materialising tendency which finds satisfaction in "the sensible image." Everywhere in the law and the prophets we find the realisation of this tendency and its uncompromising condemnation. Such

condemnation speaks in the legislation, early and late, directed against the making of any graven image, and it forms the permanent text of the great preachers.

Law after law was directed against that obvious idolatry which was as tempting to the chosen people as to their neighbours on every side. Again and again does the Lord say unto Moses : " Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel. Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold."[1] Prophet after prophet hurled denunciations at that subtler idolatry, none the less real and far more dangerous because it is often not obvious at all, which substitutes outward observance for inward devotion ; the worship of the symbol for the worship of the thing symbolised.

" To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me ? saith the Lord. When ye come to appear before me who hath required this at your hand, to trample my courts ? Bring no more vain oblations ; incense is an

[1] Exodus xx., 22, 23.

abomination unto me; new moons and sabbaths,—the calling of assemblies,—I cannot away with iniquity and the solemn meeting. Your new moons and your appointed feasts my soul hateth: they are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them. . . . Wash you, make you clean; put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow."[1]

The Hebrew identification of religion and ethics; the Hebrew indifference to the beauty of art; and the Hebrew conviction that the relation between the soul and God is immediate and requires no visible mediation, all combined to support lawgiver and prophet in their distrust of symbol, in their conviction that since God is a spirit the true worshippers are those that worship Him in spirit. But though the more obvious forms of idolatry were finally and effectually stamped out in Palestine, it was a harder matter to get rid of the subtler forms of externalism. The beauty and richness of Christian ritual was in origin Greek and Roman, not Jewish, but the spirit which trusts in outward observance was by no means absent from the Judaism of the first century.

[1] Isaiah, chap. i.

This spirit had always maintained its hold in the Temple worship, indeed some enterprising liturgist had not scrupled to adapt to Temple usages, by means of an additional stanza, the Fifty-first Psalm itself; and its later manifestation was not confined to the priestly party, the Sadducees, that small section of the nation which, rich, aristocratic, worldly, kept on excellent terms with the pagan conquerors. It was to be met with everywhere throughout that Jewish Church of which Ezekiel, in his banishment, was the real founder, throughout the ranks of that zealous national party—the Pharisees; and it manifested itself in that sort of externalism which delights in broad phylacteries and salutations and chief seats; in prayers and alms and fastings, "to be seen of men"; which is given to much washing of cups and pots and brazen vessels, to careful tithing of mint and anise and cummin, and which is exceedingly faithful to tradition and to the precepts of men.

The attitude of Jesus toward these outward observances seems to have been at one with

the attitude of the prophets. He seems to have constantly pointed out the danger inherent in all externalism, in the use of all forms of symbol, whether material or intellectual, the danger of transforming a means into an end, of resting in the seen, instead of reaching through the seen to the unseen, of substituting the visible image for the invisible idea, the letter for the spirit. It is a danger obvious to the whole Christian world, as it gazes upon the savage prostrate before his idol; a danger obvious to a section of the Christian world, as it gazes at the remaining portion bending before images of the virgin and the saints; a danger obvious to a section of that section, as it gazes upon its remainder, much concerned with crosses and candles and genuflections; and, finally, it is a danger obvious in *all* "ecclesiasticism" to that minority who hold with Sabatier that,

"Paganism and idolatry, of which we pretend to have so much horror, are simply the localisation and materialisation, more or less conscious, of the divine Spirit and of divine Grace, whatever may be the visible organ to which you bind them, Pope of Rome or Pythoness of

Delphi, images of gods or images of virgin and of saints, sacramental liturgies, the deification of a church, a priesthood, or a book."

But this danger, so obvious to us in regard to the symbols of others, is inevitably obscured in regard to our own symbols by that power of association which gradually invests the symbol with the sacredness of that for which it stands. The sensible image tends always to substitute itself for the idea which it represents and to take to itself the devotion which it is meant to lift to that idea. If it were not so we should not find it so hard to part with symbols which have ceased to be representative, but, in our very faithfulness to the living spirit, would lay aside its dead body without such desperate heartache. So long as human nature is human nature, it will love the outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace, and, so loving, will be tempted to stay itself upon this outward sign, and to make of it a thing sacred in itself. And nowhere is this plain truth written more plainly than in the history of Christian ecclesiasticism.

The Christian Church has been especially rich in symbolism, in sensible images,—is itself symbol raised to a high power,—but few will maintain that the relation between this wealth of symbol and the ideas to be found in the Sermon on the Mount and the Parables of Jesus is a relation vital and immediate. As we stand in the vast basilica and hear, floating through clouds of incense, the tinkle of the silver bell announcing the elevation of the Host, very distant seem the words, "This do in remembrance of me." And, even so, the exceeding simplicity of the ideas set forth in the Sermon and in the Parables would seem to be a main reason why humanity should have found it so difficult not to lose them in the very form which was supposed to enshrine them.

The Founder of Christianity taught a way of life, a way, that is, of living in a certain spirit, and ever since his followers have been busy in trying to imprison that spirit in some sort of letter, to substitute some manner of definite observance for the free ideas of the

gospel. They have indeed shown an amazing ingenuity in this direction. The variety of substitutes suggested is so great that one has to look close to recognise back of them all, back, alike, of splendid ritual and stern asceticism, of the formalism of the priest and the formalism of the Quaker, the same human clinging to the letter, the same human fear of trusting itself to be upheld by the free spirit. Yet, assuredly, all these phenomena do have the same root, and, as we consider them, we see everywhere the same tendency to deify the letter which has been substituted for the spirit, to make of it a thing powerful and sacred in itself, a thing sufficient unto salvation. The familiar spectacle of Louis XI. on his knees before his leaden saints is but a vivid and picturesque illustration of much of the Christianity of history.

It were unnecessary to dwell upon this, certainly so for Protestant readers. The only point I am concerned to make is that Louis in his religion was no deliberate hypocrite. We call his devotion superstition—a convenient term—but it was none the less devotion, and

Louis was in his own eyes a most Christian king. So easy is it for the human spirit to substitute the sensible image for the spiritual reality, to juggle successfully with its finest aspirations. A scandalous spectacle is Louis, but, if we ponder the matter, shall we be so eager to cast our stones at his "superstition"? For very subtle is this sin of the soul. We recognise it readily when we hear a lie from lips which have but just kissed a crucifix; when we behold a rosary laid aside that the hand which held it may be free to take what is another's; but we are slower to recognise the sin when, in the very doorway of the Church of Christ, we obey the selfish impulse, pass the harsh judgment, speak the unkind and contemptuous word; and go our way, in our hand a book of devotion, and in our heart God knows what pitiful complacency.

For the temptation to stay the soul upon outward things is none the less real because it comes to spirits the most finely touched in the form of an angel of light; in an outward devotion full of charm and beauty, declaring that

true worship is not of the head but of the heart. Here, indeed, lies the attraction of ecclesiasticism for the intelligent and educated classes—in its freedom from the rigid limitations of "intellectualism," in its appeal to that in man which makes his reach exceed his grasp. Here, indeed, the Church has great allies—all those instinctive beliefs which can never find adequate expression in words, all those profound convictions which can never harden into dogma, all that hunger and thirst after God which shrinks from formulated opinions about Him.

As, grieved and wearied with the burden of our sins, we kneel in the great church, which, in its beauty of upspringing column and mighty arch, of shadowed light and softened colour, is itself a visible symbol of an invisible thought, and, so kneeling, listen to the noble and gracious words coming to us from the hearts of saints and heroes, words grown ever dearer through their association with all the deepest experiences of life, we feel stealing into our hearts, full of the desire of those that

are sorrowful, the joy and strength and peace known to the great spirits, whose own hearts, throughout the ages, have been stayed upon God. In our daily life we are very strenuous of our opinions,—heresy, so far as I can see, no whit less strenuous than orthodoxy,—but as the great anthem mounts into the dim recesses of the church, we find ourselves in that blessed mood in which the effort to explain this unintelligible world passes from us, and softened, humbled, quickened by the very love of God, the burden of the mystery is lightened and we know in truth that "he to whom the eternal word speaketh is delivered from many an opinion."[1]

Truly here, in its avoidance of intellectualism, in its willingness to accept outward conformity in the place of formulated conviction, lies the most subtle and enduring power of ecclesiasticism; especially of that assured and consistent ecclesiasticism which, in spite of untoward circumstances, still sits enthroned upon the Seven Hills; and it is a power of

[1] Thomas à Kempis: *The Imitation of Christ.*

which present-day Protestantism, with its uncertain outlook, is manifestly afraid. In a pamphlet entitled, *Thoughts on the Present Position of Protestantism*, Adolf Harnack quotes the following passage from "an enlightened Roman Catholic":

"Catholicism, as it is, gives us just what we want, a comprehensive religion, a religion full of myths, superstitions, and absurdities, and on the other hand, full of profound ideas, significant ritual, and flourishing symbolism, invested with an artistic charm, and yet of an ascetic character, adapted to every kind of mood and temper, while still retaining all the rings of growth in its mighty trunk. Doubts and self-tormenting questions there are none, for, if they come, authority at once steps in. *But no one, and least of all, an educated layman, is expected to assimilate this enormous system of religion as an intellectual possession, and to regard it with faith*" (the italics are mine); "on the contrary, towards it, and in it all attitudes are possible and tolerable, . . . the believer takes to it in one way, the freethinker in another. . . . Above all, do not let us have an intellectual religion; it would immediately begin to make claims and try to master the heads and consciences of men. This, says the Catholic, is what happens in Protestantism, which is accordingly narrow, limited, presumptuous, and importunate. Protestantism demands that every one shall believe the same thing, and really believe, in his inmost heart, everything that the church believes, and by it regulate his whole world and the conduct of

his life. That is just the reason why it is so divided and politically so powerless—a mere refuge for perverse and narrow minds. How large is Catholicism in comparison—how universal and how elastic!"

And, having quoted this passage, Professor Harnack adds:

"Why not accept the development? Have not we, too, finally broken with intellectualism in the sphere of religion? Do not we, too, desire that religion, unhampered by the burden of doctrine, should intervene, free and elastic in all the complicated conditions and moods of life? Those who want a great church must adapt themselves to its character and dress."

Those who want a great church. It is needless to add that Professor Harnack is not of this number; that he would hold a great church of this sort a far too costly purchase for the human soul. "He to whom the eternal word speaketh is delivered from many an opinion." That is true, but it is also true that "opinion is character in the making"; that, though the reason of man humbly admits its limitations, yet we are reasonable creatures, and at our peril betray our reason; that, though we may acknowledge that the truth which is in us is but partial truth, yet we must

be faithful to this truth or we sap the very springs of character. Religion is not a luxury of the imagination; it is a practical motive force. It does not exist to provide a retreat from life; it exists to transform life, and it can only transform it worthily through spiritual integrity. If we subscribe to an intellectual creed, we recognise intellectual responsibility; and if, playing fast and loose with such responsibility, we juggle alike with our intelligence and our aspirations, repeat with our lips formulas which our intellect condemns as false, and declare our acceptance of dogmas of which, not merely our intellect, but our conscience is afraid, we shall surely meet with that condemnation which attends the use of all symbol from which the living spirit has gone forth; shall surely find that we are separating our religion from our life, and are making of this religion "a fond thing, vainly invented."

So far as symbol—creed or sacrament—helps us to do the will, helps us to the love of God and the love of man, let us accept the help

thankfully; but let us beware lest we forget that symbol can never be more than a means to an end, and that what is truly sacred is the end and not the means. Otherwise we shall transform our help into a hindrance, and shall be forced into an unpleasant understanding of certain very old words:

"And now, O ye priests, this commandment is for you. If ye will not hear, and if ye will not lay it to heart, to give glory unto my name, saith the Lord of hosts, I will even send a curse upon you, *and I will curse your blessings;* yea, I have cursed them already, because ye do not lay it to heart." [1]

[1] Malachi, ii., 1, 2.

IV

THE PROTESTANT IDEA

"The children of Israel in times past said unto Moses, 'Speak thou unto us and we will hear: let not the Lord speak unto us lest we die.'

"Not so, Lord, not so, I beseech Thee: but rather with the prophet Samuel, I humbly and earnestly entreat, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth.'"—*Thomas à Kempis.*

BUT let us look more closely at the Protestantism which our enlightened Roman Catholic condemns with so much point. "Narrow," "limited," "presumptuous," and "importunate"; few will deny that, in its comparatively brief existence, Protestantism has been all of these. "Divided and politically powerless"; no one can deny that charge. For, however plainly history may have shown us the danger inherent in dependence upon symbol, it has shown us no less plainly that the Church of Rome was right in her contention that such dependence furnishes the only safe basis for a firm ecclesi-

asticism. This must be as obvious to the Protestant who grudgingly admits that the shrewd old Church knew what she was about in nipping in the bud any notion of the individual that he might think for himself, as to the Catholic who points out how the wise and holy Mother, an infallible authority, through the direct and abiding inspiration of God, has controlled the presumption of fallible private judgment, and has, throughout the Christian ages, made her own the words spoken in Judæa, "Come unto me all ye who labour and are heavy-laden, and I will give you rest." Those Christians who in the sixteenth century sought to reform the Church which, *in their private judgment*, they held to have "erred, not only in living and manner of ceremonies, but also in matters of faith," introduced a principle of disintegration which has ever since been doing its work; and, furthermore, by making *conviction* and not *observance* the one thing necessary, they fatally weakened the counteracting power of ecclesiasticism. It was as if they at once undermined the fortifi-

cation and loosened the cement which held its stones together.

We all know the result. It were useless to attempt to reckon the number of sects into which Protestantism has, first and last, broken up; each protesting fragment logically considering itself, not only a church, but *the* church. The twenty-seven stalwarts in Scotland make but the moderate claim that they are the Scotch Free Kirk. They might also claim to be the one true Apostolic church, since, as Sabatier says, "Protestants have made of the Apostolic period the first chapter in the history of Protestanism, just as Catholics have made of it the first chapter in the history of Catholicism." Among all the variations of Protestant opinion, only one can be absolutely in the right; which is what the twenty-seven have pointed out. The resulting tumult of honest and earnest schism is not agreeable to contemplate; and the Roman Church has had good reason to smile, as through these last three centuries she has watched the process of disintegration, listened to the wrangling of opposing opinion,

and marked the hitherto vain effort of Protestantism to unite itself upon some common ground.

And to-day the Roman Church has more reason to smile than ever, for Protestanism is fast accomplishing the very thing she said it would finally accomplish, the destruction of the very citadel it set out to defend. Declaring for the preëminence of orthodox belief over orthodox behaviour, Protestanism, in its wholehearted devotion to definite formulas of faith, destroyed the only bulwark by which such formulas could be maintained. For definite formulas must be protected by some authority from the disintegrating action of private judgment. Private judgment is dependent upon knowledge, and must keep pace with knowledge, and as this is just what a definite formula cannot do, it is inevitable that private judgment should leave the formula behind, and should ultimately come to regard it, once again, as a fond thing, vainly invented.

This is what history—as it seems to me—has been pointing out more and more plainly

during the last three centuries,—that dogma cannot be trusted to take care of itself, but is safe only to the extent in which it is entrenched in ecclesiasticism. Give up the idea of a mediatorial institution between God and man, of a divinely constituted, authoritative church, to which belongs the right to decide all questions of belief as well as of discipline; substitute for this, the opposing idea of the direct and immediate communion of the soul with God, and of consequent individual responsibility, and nothing can stop the gradual disintegration of dogma. There is no logical stopping-place in the process, no logical break between Luther and Theodore Parker. If we must have dogma, we must have ecclesiasticism to take care of it. No substituted protector has proved trustworthy, though Protestantism, as we all know, was not slow to supply one. The earliest reformers were fearless enough in their trust in the spirit, but it soon became manifest that such trust would inevitably lead to the demoralisation of the letter, and Protestantism was by no means prepared to part with the

letter. The leaders of the Reformation very quickly perceived that to give up a central authority was to abandon themselves to all the winds of doctrine ; and having had enough of the infallible authority of a Church, having, in fact, denied the existence of such authority in getting rid of all that portion of the teaching of this Church which they regarded in the light of " blasphemous fable and dangerous deceit," they endeavoured to make a fresh start with a fresh infallible authority,—that of a book.

It was not a new book, but it came upon the world like a new book so prudent, so far-seeing had been the Church's guardianship of it. While admitting that this book was the word of God, she had, by constituting herself its sole interpreter, not only avoided any question of divided authority, but greatly strengthened her position as the one divinely-appointed depository of all truth. In no respect did the Church of the centuries show a greater discernment, a more profound knowledge of the workings of the human mind, than in her treatment

of the Holy Scriptures, and in her determination to keep these Scriptures out of the hands of the people. Her policy was more than justified by the course of events. For when the revival of learning finally broke through her guard, and the Bible did come into the hands of the laity, Protestantism at once found its charter in a book which was conceived throughout in accordance with the Protestant idea, from whose pages rose the constant prayer, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth."

Protestantism found its charter in the Bible, but, in the nature of things, it could not find there the infallible authority which it sought; in the nature of things it could not in the long run protect this Bible from its own individualism; could not defend this Protestant book from the Protestant idea of the right of private judgment. Toward the understanding of "this work, slowly and laboriously constructed, of the ancient Jewish Synagogue and of the early Christian Church," [1] there was need of all the individual interpretation which love and

[1] Sabatier: *Religions of Authority.*

knowledge could furnish, and Luther's own contribution to the "higher criticism" was not inconsiderable. We know, indeed, that, as time went on, and the increasing rigidity of Protestantism brought with it the increasing need of some central incontestable authority, the attempt was made to maintain the absolute infallibility of the Bible by dogmatic insistence on its plenary inspiration. But there was no fulcrum upon which to rest this lever, and the attempt could meet with but temporary success. It was impossible for Protestantism long to withstand the Protestant determination to read for itself, and to seek to understand what it read in the light of increasing knowledge.

The result of this higher criticism all the world knows, and again the Roman Church may say, and does say, "I told you so." A sifting process has been applied to this book, or rather to this collection of books, by which the essential has been separated from the unessential, the temporary from the eternal. Men have come to see that to assert that equal value attaches to all portions of the collection

and that the word of God is to be found as truly in the regulations of Jewish sacrifice as in the teaching of the prophets; in the "wild stories of palace treasons and feud and murder in the Books of Kings," as in the Sermon on the Mount, is to assert what is obviously contradicted by all religious experience.

"To refer our children indifferently to Jacob and to Christ, to bid them go and learn devotion, now amid the yells of exterminating war in Gibeon, and then at the feet of the Prince of Peace in Nazareth, can only produce the most bewildered conception of Deity, and the most unsteady operation of the devotional sentiment."[1]

It were foolish to dwell upon this. The era of "destructive criticism" is past, and lo! now that it is past, it becomes apparent that it was not destructive after all. Nothing vital has been touched. On the contrary, never has the real Bible been valued as it is to-day. Not for its cosmogony, poetic as it is; not for its history, stirring and dramatic as are its records; not for its legislation, interesting as are many of its enactments; but for its unequalled expression of spiritual insight and spiritual

[1] James Martineau: *The Bible and the Child.*

experience, for its splendid and abiding faith in the eternal things which are not seen, and in the power of the human soul to lift itself into communion with that God who is the Father of us all.

Very grateful have we reason to be to the earnest and patient scholarship which has drawn aside the veil woven of legend and fable, of local and temporary legislation, of tribal warfare and international politics, and which has shown us the "heart of the Bible," the testimony of prophet and poet and seer to the eternal verities. Far from lessening the influence of the Bible, that criticism, against which, in its earlier stages, alarmed orthodoxy so vehemently protested, has served only to bring the book into closer relation to human life, by pointing out that it is not a non-natural revelation *from* God, but a natural revelation *of* God; a revelation in accord with all human experience, not outward and capricious, but inward and enduring; an everlasting witness to the reality of spiritual evolution. As we follow the story of the Hebrew people and per-

ceive how by degrees they discerned in the jealous Thunder-God of Sinai, with His denunciation of "all other gods," that Eternal One, "who created the heavens and stretched them out, he that spread forth the earth and that which cometh out of it, he that giveth breath unto the people upon it, and spirit to them that walk therein," he "whose counsels of old are faithfulness and truth,"[1] we behold the working of that law by which the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns, and we recognise how this widening process must inevitably do away with the narrower conception. Nowhere in the literature of the world is there to be found such another record of spiritual progress, as that by which the mind of man passed from the worship of the God of Joshua, personally conducting an offensive campaign and commanding His peculiar people utterly to destroy the inhabitants of the land, "both man and woman, young and old, with the edge of the sword"; to the worship of that Deity of whom Malachi cries, "Have we not

[1] Isaiah xlii., 5, and xxv., 1.

all one Father? hath not one God created us?" It is a record of spiritual progress in which the human spirit may find its greatest encouragement and inspiration, but the very fact that it is a record of spiritual progress is fatal to any attempt to derive from this book a dogmatic authority outside of the human heart.

"It is no longer the book which supports the truth of its teaching, it is the elevation, the power, the general truth of the teaching, *recognised by the conscience*, which supports the moral and religious authority of the book. There is no one now who does not admit this truth, which would have seemed intolerable to our fathers, namely, that the word of God is in the Bible, but that all the Bible is not the word of God." [1]

As we read these latest conclusions of Protestant theology we recognise that the "Holy Scriptures" have been far indeed from arresting the natural development of the Protestant idea, the idea of individual responsibility, of the supremacy of the human conscience. On the contrary, these Holy Scriptures have given to this idea additional strength, and it is between the covers of the Bible that it finds its most adequate expression.

[1] Sabatier: *Religions of Authority.*

"I waited patiently for the Lord;
And he inclined unto me and heard my cry.
He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay;
And he set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings.
And he hath put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God:
Many shall see it and fear,
And shall trust in the Lord.
Blessed is the man that maketh the Lord his trust,
And respecteth not the proud nor such as turn aside to lies.
Many, O Lord, my God, are the wonderful works which thou hast done,
And thy thoughts which are to usward:
They cannot be set in order unto thee;
If I would declare and speak of them,
They are more than can be numbered.
Sacrifice and offering thou hast no delight in;
Mine ears hast thou opened:
Burnt-offering and sin-offering hast thou not required.
Then said I, Lo, I am come;
In the roll of the book it is written of me:
I delight to do thy will, O my God;
Yea, thy law is within my heart." [1]

Yea, thy law is within my heart—there, in brief, is the Protestant idea.

[1] Psalm xl.

V

ULTRA-PROTESTANTISM

"O God who art the truth, make me one with Thee in everlasting love. It wearieth me often to read and hear many things. In Thee is all that I would have and can desire. Let all doctors hold their peace; let all creatures be silent in Thy sight, speak Thou alone unto me."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

"YEA, thy law is within my heart." It is because Protestantism cannot, without ceasing to be Protestantism, recognise any outward authority inconsistent with this inward law, that I have ventured to assert that there is no logical break between Luther and Theodore Parker. And in this assertion the Roman Church would cheerfully bear me out. Only she would prefer—slightly prefer—to say: There is no logical break between Luther and atheism. Newman did say this—finally. "I am a Catholic," he declares, "because I believe in God."

But to the large majority of Protestants to-day the religion of Theodore Parker will seem a sufficiently alarming goal; and if they really become convinced that this *is* the goal to which the path they are following leads, that the Protestant idea, if allowed to have its own way, will inevitably work itself out to this conclusion, they will certainly question the validity of this idea as they have never questioned it before. And if these things come to pass what will be the long result? Will the majority of Protestants retreat into the one assured "Religion of Authority" which permits no doubts or tormenting questions, or will they keep their faith in the inward guide and follow it into a Religion of the Spirit? The years alone can answer this question, and the future guards its secrets well. But, though the Time-Spirit is indifferent to party and sect, and transfers his support without scruple, just at present he is undeniably with advanced Protestant thought, and this fact lends an, at least, present interest to the position of the ultra-Protestant. If Theodore Parker is really the representative

of this position, if Unitarianism really is the logical outcome of the Protestant idea, then the religious position of this numerically unimportant sect acquires a new interest for Protestantism in general.

I suppose no one nowadays would question the indentification of Parker with Unitarianism, though the Unitarians of Parker's day did cast forth this nineteenth-century Luther. For the Unitarianism which repudiated Parker has passed away. Having let go its hold upon dogmatic authority, it strove in vain to stay itself on a slippery inclined plane. If there is any "old-fashioned Unitarianism" left in the land, it is practically obliterated by liberal orthodoxy, which is at present occupying the inclined plane in its stead. Unitarianism has completed the slide, and whatever weakness may be charged against it to-day, it is no longer weak from the attempt to hold a precarious theological position. If it represents "mere theism," it represents *pure* theism. That weakness *is* charged against Unitarianism, that it has not hitherto proved what is called "a vigorous

sect," is, I suppose, beyond dispute. A hundred years ago it seemed likely to have things pretty much its own way in New England. "Of the twenty-five churches first founded in Massachusetts about twenty were Unitarian. . . . The wealth, culture, and social influence of Boston were Unitarian,"—as were nine of its ten churches, and the neighbouring college. "The great offices of the state were held by Unitarians. . . . The Unitarian clergy list was such a roster of splendid names as no clergy of like numbers in Christendom could show. . . . There was much to justify the prophecy that was uttered that Unitarianism would presently become the prevailing form of American Christianity."[1]

Why has not the prophecy been fulfilled? Why has Unitarianism remained so nearly stationary? The question, in view of the present bent of the Time-Spirit becomes of increasing interest. Many answers have been given to it, and there is probably some truth in most

[1] Leonard Woolsey Bacon: *The Congregationalists*, in the *Story of the Churches*.

of them; there may even be some ground for the familiar gibe that Unitarians have not wished to make their religion too common. But, to my seeing, the various explanations of the stationary character of Unitarianism grow from one root; to me it seems that the real trouble with the Unitarian body *as a whole*, and therefore with Unitarianism as a leader, is a lack which results in a great measure from the circumstances of its development, the lack of *positive* spiritual conviction.

Unitarian ideas are as old as Christianity, but Unitarianism as a distinctly organised movement of thought came into existence as a protest of Protestantism, and it has never wholly divested itself of its negative character, but has remained to a great extent negative in its distinctive convictions and negative in its distinctive virtues. Now, protest against error if often necessary,—it would ill become a child of the Reformation to hold otherwise, —but negative convictions are merely useful in clearing the way for positive convictions, and negative virtues are not very trust-

worthy. To sweep and garnish a house is no protection against demons; there are even some varieties, notably the demons of self-sufficiency, which prefer such conditions. "Liberality," says Birrell, "is not a creed, but a frame of mind." Neither is it the absence of a creed.

The truth is you cannot make religion out of even the noblest negative protest, for there is nothing saving in protest, and religion has to do with salvation. We cannot get along without religion because we cannot get along without salvation. Some of us need more saving than others, but we all need it. It has often been said that Unitarianism is weak because it has too much confidence in "the rectitude of man." I do not myself believe that it is possible to have too much confidence in the *ultimate* rectitude of man, but it certainly does seem to me that Unitarianism has underrated the need of a positive faith in helping man to realise his rectitude, that is, to make it real, and to work out his salvation,—to work it out, if necessary, in fear and trembling. A vital

religion must not only comfort and build up believers unto salvation but it must have light and power to convince and convert sinners, and such light and power come only from strong spiritual conviction.

It is hard to make people believe that the soul requires nourishment as truly as the intellect or the body, and grows strong in the same fashion. It may be true as Thomas à Kempis says that "he that knoweth how to live inwardly, neither requireth places nor awaiteth times for performing of religious exercises," but is it such a simple thing to know how to live inwardly? Do not most of us need to learn the secret from those to whom have been given the greater gifts? Very full of trouble is this human life; our sins are many; the remembrance of them is grievous unto us, the burden of them is intolerable; and, often, without sin of ours, there comes to us a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind. We have sore need of the healing touch of One who is full of compassion, long suffering and of great pity; sore need to learn from the spiritual

experiences of souls greater than our own that

> "Consolation's sources deeper are
> Than sorrows deepest,"

and that the heart-felt prayer,

> "Create in me a clean heart, O God;
> And renew a right spirit within me,"

has never been lifted in vain to Him who discovereth deep things out of darkness, and bringeth out to light the shadow of death.

"Salvation by character," reads the Unitarian creed; and the words express a noble idea—the idea that salvation is a process. But as we *work out* this process through the building up of character, how shall we "lay stone to stone," how shall our "bleeding feet and aching hands" toil faithfully through "hours of gloom," unless the will be strengthened by "hours of insight"? And such hours of insight are born of positive not negative conviction. "It is God that justifieth; who is he that shall condemn?" Paul and Luther and Parker were justified, not by their *protest* but by their faith.

This doctrine, now, of "Justification by Faith": Unitarianism has always protested vigorously against its "antinomian tendency," but has it not been too much preoccupied with this protest to grasp very clearly the essential meaning of the doctrine itself? One may carry the question back to the earliest Christian documents. The Apostle to the Gentiles is held mainly responsible for the doctrine—certainly he had positive convictions in this direction—and we find a very early Unitarian, the writer of the Epistle of James, opposing Paul on the familiar ground that "faith without works is dead." Now in this contention "James" is manifestly right, faith without works *is* dead: but such faith as Paul's could no more be without works than a deeply rooted and well-nourished tree can be without fruit. The *purpose* of the tree is the fruit, but to make of this fact a reason for starving the roots is to take a somewhat superficial view. "Do we then make the law of none effect through faith? God forbid: nay, we *establish* the law."

Luther called "James" an "epistle of straw."

Surely it is not that. Its writer was a very good man, and he says many wise and beautiful things, but he did not grasp the essential meaning of the great spiritual doctrine which he opposed. He opposed it because he did not understand it, and he failed to understand it because he failed to go deep enough. There is no more hopeful sign in the Unitarianism of to-day than its apparently growing inclination to exchange the reading of "James," for the study of Paul. It means study, for Paul is difficult—there is no denying that.

He was a Jew, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin; a Hebrew of Hebrews, "as touching the law a Pharisee, as touching zeal, persecuting the church, as touching the righteousness which is in the law, *found blameless.*"[1] A Pharisee indeed! And as Sabatier truly says, "the Pharisee long continued in St. Paul after he became an Apostle of Christ." One sees it in his preoccupation with logic—logic hair-splitting and sophistical enough at times; in his tendency to intellectualise and dog-

[1] Philippians iii., 5, 6.

matise. One sees it, too, in those occasional outbreaks of proud bitterness and harsh contempt with which he sometimes meets the natural distrust of his less gifted brethren of Jerusalem.

Moreover, Paul was a theologian, and took more interest in basing a theological structure on his notion of the second Adam than in the report of the little group of disciples concerning the practical teaching of Jesus; was more preoccupied with his theory of the cross, than with the details of the life which led to the cross. Nevertheless, though one may hesitate to fall in with the somewhat naïve statement of a modern "champion of orthodoxy" that he "finds in the Epistles to the Romans and Ephesians a fuller manifestation of the mind of Christ than in the Sermon on the Mount,"[1] it remains true that this Pharisee, so unlike the Master in temperament and training, grasped more clearly than any of the immediate followers of that Master the central idea of his teaching,—the idea that the letter killeth,

[1] Dr. Dale: quoted in *The Atonement in Modern Religious Thought.*

but the spirit giveth life, "so that we serve in newness of the spirit, not in oldness of the letter."[1] So, again and again, does the spirit that was in Paul get the better of his pride of intellect and Pharasaic training, the "lendings" are thrown aside, and the mighty soul of the man asserts itself and sends a voice ringing down the centuries.

Paul is generally regarded as the tutelary saint of Protestantism, and with reason. He was not an "ecclesiastic," and his views as to "bondage to beggarly rudiments," and the "observance of days and months and seasons and years,"[2] were much more to the mind of the Reformers than to that of the builders of the Church Catholic. So was it also with his body of doctrine, and even with his temper. His writings fairly bristle with Protestant pronouncements: "For why is my liberty judged by another conscience?"[3] "Let no man judge of you by a new moon or a Sabbath."[4] "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty."[5] Paul

[1] Romans vii., 6.
[2] Gal. iv., 9, 10, 11.
[3] 1 Cor. x., 29.
[4] Col. ii., 16.
[5] 2 Cor. iii., 17.

is distinctly a Protestant doctor, and Ultra-Protestantism can find no better guide up the mount from whose summit the Great Sermon is still preached than this "least of the apostles," "born out of due time"; this man of contradictions who, "weak in bodily presence and in his speech of no account," tormented by the thorn in his flesh, emotional and impressionable in spite of his powerful intellect, yet towers above the Twelve through the power of the faith that was in him; a faith run in a dogmatic mould created out of various elements by a great, original genius, but remaining always a *spiritual principle*, "a holding fast to an unseen power of goodness."[1]

The dogmatic mould has been broken by the centuries. For "whether there be prophecies, they shall be done away; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall be done away. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part; but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away." But the need

[1] Matthew Arnold: *St. Paul and Protestantism*.

of the *subjective principle*, of the "holding fast to an unseen power of goodness," remains. "But now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; and the greatest of these is love."[1]

Here is sure footing for a "liberal church"; here is a "positive conviction" for such a church to take into its heart, a vital principle which shall never fail it. For love—the love of God and the love of man which Jesus taught, which was his religion—*never* faileth; but in the midst of tongues that shall cease, and prophesying and knowledge that shall pass away, such love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God; and the Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit that we are children of God."[2]

If this twentieth century is really to see a march into the Promised Land of a Religion of the Spirit, the Unitarians would seem to be stationed well in the van of such a movement. But it is not enough to be *stationed* there.

[1] 1 Corinthians, chap. xiii. [2] Romans viii., 16.

Spiritual leadership means spiritual progress. Men may be driven by reason to a change of opinion, but they can be led to a living faith only by a living faith, a faith whose "loss in extent," to use Jowett's words, has meant "a gain in intensity." Is such a faith in Unitarianism? It has been one of many leavens working in the meal of Protestantism, is it capable of being something more than this? a force as well as an influence? "By their fruits ye shall know them." That appears to be the test which the new century proposes for the new creeds. Will Unitarianism meet this test? Now that the need for negative protest is passing away will it prove to hold a positive faith sufficient unto salvation, justifying its creed of "salvation by character," through the production of a type of character especially and increasingly faithful and hopeful and loving? If so, and there are "signs of promise," it will assuredly hold its place in the van; if not—so, at least, it seems to me—its reason for being will pass away with the passing of those dogmatic assertions against which it protested,

and it will hardly avoid losing itself in the advancing ranks of liberal orthodoxy. In which division of those ranks? Will Unitarianism, one of these days, find itself once more shoulder to shoulder with its "Congregational*ist*" brethren? This would seem the most natural outcome. But the actual indications point in a different direction. Jowett long ago remarked of "Dissent," that its "constant degeneration into Unitarianism and never into Latitudinarianism" was "a remarkable feature." It is a no less remarkable feature that what Unitarianism "degenerates" into is not merely Latitudinarianism but genuine Ritualism. It is seldom that a Unitarian is converted into an orthodox Dissenter, but Unitarians frequently enter the Episcopal Church, and not infrequently become Roman Catholics. It is indeed a feature eminently worth remarking by Protestantism in general. At a first glance it seems to testify to the wisdom of Emerson's disconcerting angel, "In vain produced, all rays return"; what it really testifies to, I take it, is the hunger and thirst of the

spirit, which finds what à Kempis would call a certain *hardness* and *dryness* in an Ultra-Protestantism, the natural development of which has been almost purely intellectual.

For the defect of "intellectualism," that defect of the quality of the whole Protestant movement, is no less the defect of negative than of positive intellectualism, and it is a defect which can only be remedied by the action of the free spirit.

The two positive commandments reasserted by Jesus have a power unknown to the ten negative commandments of the Mosaic dispensation, and the Ultra-Protestantism which would lead us into a Religion of the Spirit must write the commandments of its new covenant, not "Thou shalt *not* believe in a Trinity, or a Hell, or a vicarious Atonement: thou shalt *not* believe in the high mysteries of election and reprobation," but—

"Thou *shalt* believe in God, and in man as the child of God: thou *shalt* believe in the power unto salvation of faith and

hope and love—whereof the greatest is love."

Such an Ultra-Protestantism need have no fear of "reaction."

VI

THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

"The woman saith unto him, Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet. Our fathers worshipped in this mountain ; and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship. Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when neither in this mountain, nor in Jerusalem, shall ye worship the Father. . . . The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth : for such doth the Father seek to be his worshippers. God is a Spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth."—*The Gospel according to St. John.*

BUT the mention of the tendency occasionally discernible in Ultra-Protestantism to hark back to thorough-going ecclesiasticism, brings us naturally to the further question whether in Protestantism the Protestant idea must necessarily have its own way and work itself out to its logical conclusion ; whether a compromise may not be possible between the extreme individualism of Protestantism and the extreme ecclesiasticism of the Roman Church, a compromise which should preserve the Chris-

tian Religion from being, on the one hand, "narrow, limited, presumptuous, and importunate," and on the other, "vain, erroneous, superstitious, and idolatrous." And this question looks directly for its answer to the great attempt at such compromise—the Church of England.

In point of fact, one of the plain results of the present decreasing confidence in the ability of dogma to protect itself is an increasing interest in the Church which never left it wholly unguarded by "observance," in the Church whose Protestantism was never more than partial; who protested only against the abuses of the Catholic idea, not against this idea itself; and who, in this moderate spirit, sought to entrench a moderate amount of dogma in a moderate amount of ecclesiasticism, enough dogma to make a firm creed, in enough ecclesiasticism to take care of it. With the existing religious outlook it is natural—to me it seems inevitable — that religious men and women should look to this Church of the Middle Way as a possible refuge, and even as

a possible "reconciler of Christendom." Have we not been told that it is that very Freedom whom the twentieth century reverences that turns to scorn the "falsehood of extremes"? Is not the "Middle Way" not only the expedient way, but the true way of liberty? The *Via Media* in general has always been well spoken of, and the history of the Anglican Church—a term which, as I use it, covers, of course, all the branches of this Church—must be of profound interest to all who cannot resign the hope of that far-off divine event, the evolution of a Christian Church which shall be truly Catholic, nay, truly Christian, for, as Sabatier says, "no reform, no progress, no perfecting, can raise Christianity above itself; that is to say, above its principle, for these reforms and this progress only bring it into closer conformity to that principle; that is, make it more Christian."

It goes without saying that, even in the sixteenth century, it was not the intention of the Anglican Church to range herself with out-and-out Protestantism as represented by the

Puritans. Protestant she was, could not help being, since she protested against constituted ecclesiastical authority ; but she manifestly intended to direct this protest exclusively against what she considered " Romish abuses " ; and, while protesting against the dangers arising from a too great dependence upon symbol, was far from protesting against the *use* of symbol. On the contrary, she placed a high value upon observance and conformity, and though, necessarily, resting her protest upon the right of private judgment, by no means intended to exalt private judgment to the prejudice of such observance and conformity.

But when we read the Thirty-nine Articles in conjunction with the " Creed of Pius IV." and with the " Augsburg Confession," it needs no theologian come from the grave to tell us that these Articles were in their conception distinctly Protestant. And Protestant they have remained in spite of all the subtlety which found its subtlest expression in " Tract Ninety" ; Protestant, not more by their negative protest against Pope and Purgatory, pardons and

masses and images and relics, than by their positive assertions that the Church of Christ is a "congregation of faithful men"; that "general councils may and have erred"; that "Justification by Faith only is a most wholesome doctrine," and, perhaps most significant of all, that the doctrine of Transubstantiation, the basis of Catholic philosophy, "overthroweth the nature of a sacrament."

But though these Articles were and are Protestant, they were bound up with a Liturgy which was and is Catholic—the "Minister" of the Articles is still a "Priest in the Church of God," to whom is "committed the Holy Ghost" by the imposition of hands—"whose sins thou dost forgive they are forgiven: and whose sins thou dost retain, they are retained," —and not all the wisdom and skill of the framers of the Articles, a wisdom and skill emphasised by time, has been able to prevent the difficulties arising from even the most conscientious attempt to sit upon two stools at once.

These difficulties are familiar ones,—the

well-known epigram as to the Church of England's "Calvinistic Articles, Popish Liturgy, and Arminian Clergy" was Chatham's, was it not? It has been, of course, inevitable that a Church whose statement of faith and whose form of worship are thus the outgrowth of opposing ideas should be open to many attacks from without and many perturbations from within. In spite, however, of these attacks and these perturbations, the Church has faithfully continued her attempt to reconcile the apparently irreconcilable, the importance of outward conformity and the sacredness of inward conviction; the authority of a divinely constituted "instrument of salvation" and the glorious liberty of the children of God. And however one may be inclined to estimate the degree of success which has attended this attempt, the attempt itself has been rendered profoundly interesting by the fact that it has had the support of the very wise, the very learned, the truly spiritually-minded; and by the further fact, revealed in the study of this Church's history, that she has found in her

apparent source of weakness a real source of strength, and that the great vitality which she has shown in the past, and shows in the present, is largely due to the peculiarity which her opponents call her "fundamental inconsistency," and which she herself terms her "comprehension."

Open to attacks both from Rome and Geneva, always engaged in an internal struggle to prevent her high-churchmen from becoming out-and-out Catholics, and her low-churchmen from becoming out-and-out Protestants, she has found in her double nature a protection both from external accusation and internal dissension. When Rome has taken occasion to point out that a Church which began its independent existence by the sin of schism, by a protest against ecclesiastical authority, is obviously a Protestant Church and should not call itself Catholic, she has answered that she protested only against human error on behalf of the true Catholic and Apostolic Church, and has called attention to the undeniable Catholicism of her Liturgy. When

Dissent has taken occasion to point out that a Church which has been practically disloyal to the Protestant idea that Justification is by Faith only, by inward conviction and not by outward observance, is obviously a Catholic Church and ought not to call itself Protestant, she has answered that sound doctrine has always been her main concern, and has called attention to the undeniable Protestantism of her Articles. And when certain of her own children have been led, by the exigencies of logic, to the conclusion that, in spite of appearances, a Church cannot be at the same time both Catholic and Protestant, and have therefore become, according to their leading, either "Romanists" or "Dissenters"; she has seen them depart from her fold with sorrow,—sorrow mingled, in the former case, with wrath, and in the latter, with contempt;—but none the less steadily has she continued her attempt to keep that slippery Middle Way which they have eschewed, mightily sustained therein by the spectacle, on the one hand, of a reactionary Roman Church, and, on the

other, of a veritable riot of dissent. And, in spite of desertions to the right and to the left, she has never shown greater vigour, relatively to the other branches of the Christian Church, than she shows to-day.

All this seems to me true. But it also seems to me true that in the very cause of this present-day relative vigour of the English Church lies hidden a greater menace to the preservation of her double nature, and thereby to her peculiar individuality, than she has ever yet encountered. Never having been Protestant enough to lay sole stress upon dogma, she is less perturbed by the disintegration of dogma than are her purely Protestant neighbours, and herself taking refuge more and more in her reformed Catholicism, she offers this refuge to those, who, troubled by the tottering of dogmatic structures, are yet not prepared to go all the way, and to seek protection from Roman Catholicism. And the offer is frequently accepted. Never has her position as a half-way house stood the Anglican Church in better stead. But if this half-way house be-

comes any more divided against itself than it is at present how shall it stand? And how, under the existing conditions of religious thought, shall it avoid such increasing division? The mills of God grind slowly, but they have been grinding steadily upon Protestantism since the sixteenth century, and circumstances which in the past have favoured the "comprehension" of the English Church, favour it no longer. The two stools upon which she originally planted herself are being drawn farther and farther apart, — it would seem as if she must in the end hold definitely to one or the other. Which does she really value most, — her Catholicism or her Protestantism?

It is natural that her counsels on this point should be divided, for while she owes her existence to her Protestantism, is it not to her Catholicism that she owes the vigorous continuance of her existence? Certainly it is to her Catholicism that she owes that elasticity which has protected men of great intelligence and learning from the consequences of their

intelligence and learning; which has even protected men of great intellectual integrity and spiritual discernment from the consequences of their integrity and discernment. One appreciates the protective power, even in a modified form, of the Catholic idea of a divinely constituted authoritative Church, when one reads treatises in which good and honest men carefully discuss how far sons of the Church are justified in holding beliefs "contrary to their profession," in appearing to accept what their private judgment repudiates, and in "silently acquiescing" in doctrines which they cannot audibly defend. One appreciates the protective power of this idea anew when one beholds Stanley a high dignitary in a Church which officially declares that "in every person born into this world the flesh deserveth God's wrath and damnation"; that "they that presume to say, that every man shall be saved by the Law or Sect which he professeth, so that he be diligent to frame his life according to that Law and the light of nature," are "to be had accursed"; that man since the fall of Adam

"cannot turn and prepare himself, by his own natural strength and good works, *to faith and calling upon God*"; nay that "works done before the grace of Christ are not pleasant to God," but "we doubt not have the nature of sin"; and which recognises the power of "the devil" to make use of "the Sentence of God's Predestination" to "thrust curious and carnal persons into desperation." And one appreciates perhaps more fully still the power of the idea of "the Church" when one contemplates the faithful allegiance to this Church of minds such as Jowett's or Arnold's, and knows not whether most to admire the forbearance of the son toward the persecuting Church, or the forbearance of the Church toward the persecuting son.

But, while thus profiting by the Catholic idea, the Anglican Church has been able hitherto to avoid the full consequences of this idea. For until recent times circumstances have protected her from these consequences. During the past hundred years, however, the logic of Catholicism and the logic of Protestantism

have alike been demonstrating the truth of the proposition that "there is no middle term between the rule of the letter and the rule of the spirit"[1]: Catholic logic has resulted in the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope, and Protestant logic has resulted in the discrediting of all dogma as dogma. Catholicism has become more than ever a Religion of Authority, while Protestantism is fast transforming itself into a Religion of the Spirit, or, to be more exact, is fast recognising, as it puts aside the external authority of the Book as it has already put aside the external authority of the Church, that it is, of necessity, and in its very nature, a Religion of the Spirit.

Here, in the change of attitude toward the Bible, lies the difficulty which, so far as one can see, must be met by the Anglican Church. Hitherto Protestantism, as well as Catholicism, has been a Religion of Authority, and the Church of "comprehension" has been able to help out her "limited infallibility" as an institution by the absolute infallibility of the Book.

[1] Sabatier: *The Religions of Authority.*

But this support has failed. Protestantism has practically given up the resort to external authority, and, if the Anglican Church remains Protestant, she must accept the inevitable development of Protestantism,—its development, sooner or later, into a Religion of the Spirit. But can she do this and retain her elaborate ecclesiastical organisation? How far is such an organisation possible without a definite dogmatic foundation? Was, or was not, Disraeli right when he replied to certain heterdox utterances of Stanley's: "Yes, Mr. Dean, but you must remember, no dogma—no Dean"?

And these questions are but the leaders of many consequent questions. Suppose Disraeli was right, and suppose the Church, meeting this dilemma, decides that, rather than part with her dogma and the structure which it supports, she will part with her Protestantism, how will she avoid the logical conclusion of her brilliant son, the clear-headed and clear-souled Newman, that to protect dogma against the disintegrating force of human thought

nothing will suffice short of an *infallible* ecclesiasticism?

If the ritualists are destined to make good their contention that the Anglican Church belongs to them, will it not prove their best, if not their only, policy, to burn those troublesome Articles, heal the breach, which, after all, is only of yesterday, and find their way back into that powerful Church of history which admits no embarrassing doubts of its infallibility, and is not only capable of taking care of dogma, but is even prepared to reinterpret it (still infallibly) in terms of modern thought, thus enabling the Holy Spirit to catch up—approximately—with the advancing spirit of man?

But — yet more questions — if the High Church is driven, or led, to this policy, what will become of the Low Church, and the Broad Church? Will the Church of England follow the Anglican Church? It is hard to believe this. There is no question that the Low Church would be loth to part with its Protestantism, and as for the Broad Church?—I wonder if it is fair to take the Master of Balliol

as its exponent ?—if so, here are certain of his *obiter dicta :*

"We shall never return to the belief in facts which are disproved, e.g., miracles, the narratives of creation—of Mt. Sinai. And we shall never return to the belief in dogmas, which belong to another age and to ourselves are mere words."

"It is, however, possible that ideas may again take possession of men in the same absorbing manner in which they did of old."

"Natural religion should so leaven and penetrate Christianity (without the words natural religion ever appearing) that the doubtful points and doctrines of Christianity should drop off of themselves."

"It is not with the very words of Christianity, but with the best form of Christianity as the world has made it, or can make it, or will receive it, that we are concerned to-day."

"A new religion? Not exactly so, but people must believe more strongly in a few truths which we all acknowledge, and they must apply them more vigorously to practical life."

"I think that I believe more and more in Christianity —not in miracles or hell or verbal inspiration or atonement, but in living for others and in going about doing good."

"*Apostolical succession*—a *sine qua non ;* how can that matter to any one who considers what religion is ?"

"The church is in a bad way in the nineteenth century, but not worse than it has always been. I suppose that while using its services, we ought not to set our

hearts either upon the church of the present, or the church of the future, but to fix our minds upon God and upon our own lives."

If such sayings as these may fairly be taken as representative of the spirit of the Broad Church, it does not seem impossible that it may yet prove that "a congregation of faithful men" may be bound together by a purely spiritual bond, and if so the Church of England may survive the Anglican Church.

Again, time alone will show. The old wine-skins are very precious, and, though it cannot be denied that new wine must be put into new wine-skins lest it burst the old, yet many will hold with Luke that "no man, having drunk old wine, desireth new, for he saith, The old is good." [1]

But the Master's own word was for the new wine and the fresh skins, and nowhere in all Christendom has the Master found more faithful followers than in the Broad Church. One may well ask whether these faithful followers may not show themselves ready, if

[1] Luke v., 37–39.

necessary, to obey his injunction to renounce all,—even precious forms and formularies,—that they may rise and follow him.

And follow him. For the study of Christian origins is revealing more and more plainly that the Founder of Christianity — he who asked, "and why of your own selves judge ye not what is right?"[1]—was not the Founder of the Christian Church of history. May he not yet prove to be the Founder of that holy Church universal, for which the Church of England so nobly prays, wherein "all who profess and call themselves Christians may be led into the way of truth and hold the faith in unity of spirit, in the bond of peace, and in righteousness of life"?

[1] Luke xii., 57.

VII

JESUS OF NAZARETH

"For every high priest, being taken from among men, is appointed for men in things pertaining to God that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: who can bear gently with the ignorant and erring, for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity; and by reason thereof is bound, as for the people so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh the honour unto himself, but when he is called of God, even as was Aaron. So Christ also glorified not himself to be made a high priest, but he that spake unto him,

"Thou art my Son,

"This day have I begotten thee:

as he saith also in another place,

"Thou art a priest for ever

"After the order of Melchizedek.

Who in the days of his flesh, having offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and having been heard for his godly fear, though he was a Son, yet learned obedience by the things which he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became, unto all them that obey him, the author of eternal salvation, named of God a high priest after the order of Melchizedek."—*The Epistle to the Hebrews.*

"THE Founder of Christianity." I was about to say that it is wonderful how much may be said concerning Christianity with only an occasional reference to its Founder! But, in truth,

this is not wonderful at all. For Christianity, as we use the word, includes both what I understand Lessing to mean by *the Christian Religion*, that is, the Christian body of doctrine and Christian ecclesiasticism, and also what I understand him to mean by *the Religion of Christ*, that is, the Christian way of life; and we have been hitherto mainly concerned with the former, with dogma and ecclesiasticism, whereas the Founder of Christianity seems to have been mainly concerned with the latter, with a way of life.

Nay, more than this. Suppose it were possible for us to clear our minds of those prepossessions, both conscious and unconscious, which so greatly affect our understanding, and to read the Christian Gospels simply and intelligently, as we would read them if we had never read them before; suppose it were possible for us to approach these records of the life and teachings of Jesus with the freedom of mind, the disinterestedness, with which we approach the records of the life and teaching of other great spiritual leaders: we should,

I think, be struck by the circumstance that whenever we come upon anything in the story which has to do with dogmatism or ecclesiasticism, Jesus is generally found in an attitude of opposition.

And we do come upon much of this nature. It was not an irreligious community that Jesus faced. On the contrary, it was a community preoccupied with religious ideas, a community full of zeal, faithful to its convictions and rigid in carrying them out; an orthodoxy as assured as that of Torquemada or Cartwright. It was not irreligion which crucified Jesus, it was religion—of a kind,—of that kind which finds its natural expression in formulas and observances, and stays itself upon external rather than upon internal supports. Hence its inevitable antagonism to the religion of Jesus, which was plainly of another nature. His faith in the immediate support of God would seem to have been a sufficient stay. It was a faith which required no external *rules*, since, being itself real, it inevitably realised itself in action; a faith too profound to dog-

matise, too simple to need formularies, yet a faith which gave to its possessor an authority of which the scribes knew nothing.

"Whence hath this man these things?"[1] ask these sons of them that aforetime slew the prophets. The prophets would not have asked the question. The religion of the prophets was mere theism—there is no denying that—but if it lacked "extent" it did not lack "intensity." They *knew* whereof they spoke when they declared "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." "And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever."[2]

But even among the chosen people the religion of the scribes had overlaid the religion of the prophets, encrusting it with the tradition of men. And when that Prophet came upon whom "the whole fountain of the Holy Spirit" descended saying "My Son in all the prophets have I looked forth to thee that thou shouldst

[1] Mark vi., 2. [2] Isaiah xxvi., 3; xxxii., 17.

come and that I should find in thee my place of rest,"[1] and reasserted the prophetic message,

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
Because he annointed me to preach good tidings to the poor:
He hath sent me to proclaim release to the captives,
And recovering of sight to the blind,
To set at liberty them that are bruised,
To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord"[2];—

when there appeared this last and greatest of the prophets, the religion of the scribes met him with the demand, "By whose authority?"[3] and declared—"this man blasphemeth."[4]

The religion of Jesus seems in truth to have been no more dogmatic than the religion of the prophets; seems to have been indeed like theirs,—"mere theism." At least he certainly declares that obedience from the heart to the familiar commandments of his ancestors, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God, with all thy heart and soul and mind, and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, is sufficient to secure the inheritance of eternal life; wherein he differs

[1] The Gospel According to the Hebrews.
[2] Isaiah lxi., 1, 2; Luke iv., 18, 19.
[3] Mark ix., 28.
[4] Matt. ix., 3.

from the Athanasian Creed. And the religion of Jesus seems also to have been quite indifferent to many of the observances, which his countrymen had "received to hold." Brought to book again and again for breaking the Sabbath, he defends himself by the quiet assertion, "The Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath"; an assertion which lays its axe to the root of all sacramentalism. And the act by which he introduced his preaching in Jerusalem can hardly be construed favourably to Jewish ecclesiasticism.

"And they come to Jerusalem: and he entered into the temple, and began to cast out them that sold and them that bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the money-changers, and the seats of them that sold the doves; and he would not suffer that any man should carry a vessel through the temple."[1]

Was this merely a burst of somewhat futile indignation against the existence within the temple of a traffic necessary to the maintenance of its ritual? Or was it a blow at this ritual itself, at the emphasis laid upon "burnt-

[1] Mark xi., 15, 16.

offering and sin-offering" in "a house of prayer"?

It was a bold deed for an obscure provincial; a somewhat violent deed for the preacher of gentle methods. Was it, by chance, an open denunciation of the kind of religion which the temple-worship had come to represent? It would seem as if the priests and the scribes took this view of it, for Mark goes on to tell us that it was from this time that they sought how they might destroy him.

No; neither dogmatism nor ecclesiasticism may prudently look to Jesus of Nazareth for direct support. For dogmatism and ecclesiasticism are born, not of spiritual strength, but of spiritual weakness; and that Christianity has in the past placed its main reliance upon dogma and ritual testifies, not to spiritual strength, but to spiritual weakness.

Very true, many will admit, and in just this truth lies the hopelessness of the attempt to get rid of dogma and ritual. Man *is* spiritually weak, and therefore must have these helps. We may wish it were otherwise, but we are

as we are, weak and erring and fearful; blind and deaf and lame; our feeble faith must have the support of intellectual and material symbol. The lesson of history is plain; he is but a dreamer who disregards it. "Men ever were and ever will be men," says wise Bishop Burnet, and it is vain to demand of human nature that of which human nature is incapable. It may well be that strong faith, like strong love (are they not really one?), needs no external support, but it is useless to expect of the average man and woman a faith so strong, so simple, so secure, that its only necessary dogmas are the love of God and the love of man; its only necessary ritual "the going about doing good." This, say these apologists for dogma and ritual, is the testimony of experience, the testimony of history and psychology, those teachers to whom the twentieth century makes such constant appeal.

What answer can be made to this defence of symbol, intellectual and material, by one who must indeed believe that history and psychology furnish the only safe foundation upon

which to build? Well, in the first place, so far as dogma and ritual prove genuine helps to the faith that worketh righteousness, no one, as I have said more than once before, need quarrel with them. Let those who find them helpful make use of them. Only let them never forget that they are making use of symbol, and that it is the nature of symbol to put itself in the place of that for which it stands; to take to itself an emphasis and a sacredness which does not belong to it, and, forgetting that it is a means to an end, to declare itself a *sine qua non*. This is pre-eminently the testimony of experience, this is pre-eminently the teaching of history and psychology; and this is, plainly enough, Lessing's meaning when he declares that *the Christian Religion* may be tried, and has been tried, apart from *the Religion of Christ*.

Commenting upon this saying of Lessing's, Jowett remarks:

"It seems rather boastful and extravagant, but it expresses the spirit in which any new movement for the improvement of theology must be carried on. It means

that Christians should no longer be divided into Churchmen and Nonconformists, or even into Christians and non-Christians, but that the best men everywhere should know themselves to be partakers of the Spirit of God, as He imparts Himself to them in various degrees. It means that the old foolish quarrels of science with religion, or of criticism with religion, should for ever cease, and that we should recognise all truth, based on fact, to be acceptable to the God of truth. . . . It means that we should regard all persons as Christians, even if they come before us with other names, if they are doing the works of Christ." [1]

And since the opinions of Jowett are of doubtful orthodoxy, let me quote one other opinion from a writer whose orthodoxy I have never heard questioned, the author of the Fourth Gospel. "By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." [2]

And in the second place, are the teachings of history and psychology so wholly discouraging as to the spiritual capacity of man? It is true that, in studying the evolution of even the greater religions of the world, we find everywhere more or less externalism, but is it

[1] *Life and Letters of Benjamin Jowett*, vol. ii., p. 362.
[2] John xiii., 35.

not equally true that the "white wings of the Holy Ghost," for ever brooding o'er the heads of men, are seen of many, and lo, the heavens are opened unto them; is it not equally true that everywhere we find those who, beholding the heavenly vision, are obedient to it *from the heart*, and by this obedience are freed from bondage to form and formulary? And is it not also true that the spiritual power derived from such vision is always felt and acknowledged by average humanity? that it is impossible for even the most rigid dogmatist or ritualist to escape its appeal? Spirit recognises the power of spirit, and, if it does not trust, it must fear; if it does not love, it must hate; if it does not accept, it must reject. It has been the wont of average humanity to do both; to bear witness to the might of the free spirit, first by persecution, and then by devotion; to slay the prophets and then to build and garnish their tombs. And the supreme example of such faith in all its simplicity, strength, and freedom was crucified and deified, executed as a criminal, and ex-

alted as a god. Alike by the one act and by the other, by fear and by love, did humanity recognise the compelling power of "the Spirit of God," and alike by the one act and the other did humanity—so I cannot but believe—sacrifice a saviour. For by the deification of Jesus did humanity seek to deprive itself of its own best hope, of its noblest witness to the truth that God is with it. Nowhere is the faithlessness of the children of God more pathetically written in the history of mankind than in their readiness — nay, their eagerness — to transform the Man of Nazareth into a divinity.

The process began almost at once; the greatest of the Master's followers lent it their aid,— even Paul, even the author of the Fourth Gospel. The one was too much a Pharisee, the other too much a Platonist, to hold to the simplicity and the purity which is in Christ. The second Adam, with his metaphysical victory over sin and death, has, throughout the centuries, obscured the Galilean teacher with his message of strength and comfort; and

the Logos Christ of "John" has blurred the human figure of the Jesus Christ of the Synoptics.

"And when he was come into Jerusalem all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this?' And the multitude said, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee.'"[1]

A few centuries later, when the question was asked, "Who is this?" the multitudes answered:

"This is God and Man, God of the substance of the Father, begotten before the world, and Man of the substance of his mother, born in the world. Perfect God and perfect Man. Equal to the Father as touching his Godhead, and inferior to the Father as touching his Manhood; who, although he be God and Man, yet he is not two but one Christ. One not by conversion of the Godhead into Man, but by taking of the Manhood into God. . . . This is the Catholic faith which except a man believe he cannot be saved."[2]

So, to my seeing, did the weakness and self-distrust of human nature abet the intellectual pride of theologian and philosopher; so did the multitudes willingly substitute the dogma of the divinity of Jesus for the inspiration of

[1] Matt. xxi., 10, 11.

[2] Athanasian Creed.

his human example ; the saving power of his death, for the saving power of his life.

And yet it is none the less true that, throughout the centuries, there have been faithful followers of the Master who have not sought salvation by saying, " Lord, Lord," but who, encouraged by his assurances and example to believe that men are in truth the children of their Father in heaven, have set themselves very simply to try and do the will of that Father as declared by His Son Jesus. Throughout these centuries we see the recurring effort to get back to the living teaching, to reach through metaphysical speculation about Jesus, to Jesus himself, and wherever this effort has shown itself, the *Life* has still been the light of men. For all who share the faith of Jesus must in some measure share his power ; and every one who, believing on him as a redeemer, has proved his belief by striving to enter into his faith, and to live for those things for which he lived, has proved in some measure a redeemer to those about him.

And to-day, as never before in the history of

Christian thought, is visible this effort to realise the actual life and actual teaching of Jesus of Nazareth. Partly because human life is valued as never before, because out of the idea of evolution has grown an increasing hope in the ultimate possibilities of human nature, an increasing faith in its essential worthiness and dignity; and partly because the advance in knowledge and freedom of thought, during the past hundred years, has done much to draw aside the veil woven of tradition and prejudice, men are striving as never before to reverse the process which sought to separate them from the love of God which was in Christ Jesus, and once more to make a reality of the life lived in Judæa nineteen hundred years ago. From many a watch-tower the watchmen are telling us that a true *revival* of Christianity is at hand, that the night of dogmatism is far spent, and there cometh the morning of a living faith; that

> "Through clouds of doubt and creeds of fear,
> A light is breaking calm and clear."

And nothing in the present movement of

Christian thought toward a Religion of the Spirit is more marked than the growing distinctness of the figure which Christianity, for all its pre-occupation with dogma and ritual, has ever held in its heart of hearts. It is indeed as if "beneath some mediæval fresco of an unreal and mystical Christ had been freshly laid bare the features of the man of Nazareth." [1]

The difficulties in the way of this attempt to *realise* the human life of Jesus and his immediate followers have been great, too great in some respects ever to be wholly overcome. Under the most favourable conditions the human mind finds it hard enough thus to make real conditions of life and thought quite unlike those to which it is accustomed; to enter into the spirit of a distant age, to breath its social and intellectual atmosphere, to understand its point of view. And in the case of Christian origins, the attempt to do this and "to penetrate through the radiant haze with which Jesus has been invested by tradition and

[1] Francis G. Peabody: *Jesus Christ and the Social Question.*

faith "[1] has been hampered at every turn by that strongest and blindest of forces, — religious prejudice, conscientious *pre*-judging. It is not my purpose to dwell in detail upon the effort of patient scholarship and trained judgment, illumined by imagination and insight, to overcome these difficulties; but consider for a moment their nature, consider for a moment what conditions of life and thought this scholarship and judgment and imagination and insight must strive to recreate and understand.

At a time of intense intellectual and spiritual excitement, when the Jewish national life was in a ferment of suppressed sedition and party feeling; when the long-cherished hope of a national deliverance by a Messiah-king, anointed by the God of Israel Himself for the rescue of His people from the surrounding nations, had become a breathless expectation and at the appearance of a new teacher all men mused in their hearts whether he were the Christ or not[2]; at a time when at the voice of

[1] J. Estlin Carpenter: *The First Three Gospels*. [2] Luke iii., 15.

one crying in the wilderness, "Repent ye, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!" "multitudes"—Pharisees and Sadducees as well as publicans and soldiers — flocked, confessing their sins, to a baptism which should save them from the wrath to come, demanding, "Master, what shall we do?"—at such a time there appeared from among the peasant population of the least-orthodox district of this country a young teacher, a carpenter by trade, who took up the message of the silenced John, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand," and set himself to teach the people the nature of this new kingdom.

This teaching was altogether oral, altogether occasional; and crowded into a brief period. It was addressed to a multitude largely made up of the least-reputable classes of the community; a multitude excitable and credulous to the last degree; not only "predisposed, by their ignorance of natural law, to believe in prodigies," but accustomed to demand such prodigies as the necessary credentials of a teacher. "Except ye see signs and wonders

ye will in no wise believe."[1] For our knowledge of the character of this teaching we are dependent upon the reports of this multitude; dependent wholly upon oral tradition handed down by those who listened with an understanding necessarily varying with the nature of their own prepossessions and with the degree of their intelligence and sympathy with its ideas. Of the various narratives of these matters which, in after years, many took in hand to draw up,[2] four have been preserved to us. The actual authorship of these is unknown. Concerning one of them, the Fourth, the scholarship of to-day declares that "it cannot be taken as historical authority in the ordinary meaning of the word"; that although "it is not altogether devoid of a real, if scarcely recognisable, traditional element, it can hardly make any claim to be considered an authority for Jesus' history."[3] Concerning the three other narratives, we know only that they

[1] John iv., 48; Mark viii., 11, 12.

[2] Luke i., 1.

[3] Adolf Harnack: *What is Christianity?* p. 19, Saunders' Translation.

were written from forty to sixty years after the death of the teacher whose acts and words they relate, at a time when the identification of the Galilean prophet with the Messiah had given rise to the tendency to conform the circumstances of his life and the form of his teaching to Jewish prophecy, "real and perverted," in an age absolutely uncritical, with no sense of what we mean by literary responsibility; in an age when "edification was the standard of credibility." And in the light of this knowledge we are coming to perceive that the task which even the Synoptists set themselves was, as Dr. Jülicher says, "not to *understand* and *estimate* the historical Jesus, but to believe in him, to love him above all else; to teach men to hope in him"[1]; and that in reading the First and Second and Third, as well the Fourth Gospel, it must be borne in mind that their authors "wrote as men, and that every personality is a mystery beyond a certain point."[1]

Surely if we do consider these things we

[1] Adolf Jülicher: *Introduction to the New Testament*, 1904.

shall understand better what earnest study, assisted by judgment, imagination, and insight, has accomplished in enabling us to recognise, in some measure at least, what would be the inevitable characteristics of documents produced under these conditions, and, through this recognition, to put aside those adventitious and temporary elements, so puzzling and perturbing to our ignorance, and to lay a firmer hold upon that which is essential and enduring. For so long as we read the Gospels with the constant necessity laid upon us to reconcile all their statements as *super*naturally and absolutely true, so long must we fail to grasp fully their natural, and all the more divine, truth. The higher criticism of the New Testament, in making it possible for us to read this New Testament with that free play of intelligence of which we make use elsewhere, and to which we give the humble name of common-sense, has freed us from the preoccupation of attempting an impossible reconciliation between the Fourth Gospel and the Synoptics, or even between the Synoptics

themselves in matters of detail, by showing us that such reconciliation is not a necessity of faith.

Thus scholarship is teaching us to read the Gospels freely, naturally, and, so reading, to find in "John," not only a very noble and beautiful original religious document, but, though not an historical authority in the ordinary meaning of the word, "an authority of the first rank for answering the question, What vivid views of Jesus' person, what kind of light and warmth, did the Gospel disengage?"[1] And to find in the Synoptic Gospels, though they were written "not to describe the Jesus of real life, but the Christ as he appeared to the hearts of his followers," records of

"priceless value, not only as books of religious edification, but also as authorities for the history of Jesus. Brant is not wrong, but he does not say enough, when he calls the Synoptic picture of Christ the finest flower of religious poetry. The true merit of the Synoptists is that, in spite of all the poetic touches they employed, they did not repaint, but only handed on, the Christ of history."[2]

So testifies the scholarship of the present day.

[1] Harnack: *What is Christianity?*

[2] Jülicher: *Introduction to the New Testament.*

And now that the confused alarms which greeted the application to the New Testament of the ordinary methods of history and criticism are beginning to die away, it is becoming manifest that these methods are destructive only to elements adventitious and temporary; that, indeed, they might more truly be called *realising* methods, since they are making it possible, as it has never been possible before, for Christians to *realise* the personal character of their Master, and the essential nature of his teaching.

The *essential* nature. For, in view of the peculiar difficulties presented by the Gospel narratives, is it to be wondered at that, when faithful study and trained discernment and sympathetic insight have done their best, doubtful points remain? Surely not, surely the real wonder is that these doubtful points are comparatively unimportant, so far as the practical teaching of Jesus is concerned. Certainly to me it seems that, the more one comes to understand the conditions of life and thought prevailing in the Judæan province of the Roman

Empire "about the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar," the absorbing nature of the ideas under the domination of which the Gospels were produced, the more wonderful it becomes that there should be no real question as to the essential character of this practical teaching of Jesus; and the more one feels the strength of this testimony to the definiteness and consistency of this teaching, and to the power of the personality with which the Gospels deal.

For Jesus was not only "over the heads of his reporters," he was often in direct opposition to them. Here, to me, lie the "sure things" of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; those sayings which were directly opposed to the pre-conceived ideas of his followers and which have been preserved in the face of inevitable misunderstanding and perversion. Again and again Jesus' teaching cut across the dearest prejudices and prepossessions of his people, again and again it disappointed their most cherished expectations. Trained as they were to rigid obedience to the law, with its six

hundred and more precepts, affirmative and negative, how strange to their ears must have sounded the assertion that all the law and the prophets as well were summed up in the love of God and man! Weighed down by heavy burdens of traditional observance grievous to be borne, laid upon their shoulders by Scribe and Pharisee, how far could they understand the nature of a yoke that was easy and a burden that was light? Accustomed to despise the half-blooded and heteredox Samaritan, how unexpected must have been the little parable which by one master-stroke transformed this name of reproach into a name of blessing! Accustomed on the other hand to reverence the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees, how startling must have been the vehement assertion that the publicans and the harlots should go into the kingdom of heaven before them! And this kingdom?

"The kingdom of heaven is at hand." They were quick to respond to that cry, for were they not wearying for its coming?—but what

could they make of the declaration that this kingdom would not come with observation, but that it was within them, and must be established, not, visibly, by the stretched-out arm of an angry God, but, invisibly, through the infinite love of a Father? And when Jesus, accepting, —as I believe he did,—*accepting* the perilous office of the Messiah of this kingdom, foresaw, with those clear eyes of his, that such a Messiah, in mortal antagonism to Pharasaic hatred and intolerance supported by Roman contempt and power, would fulfil no prophecy of a conquering king of David's line, but must rather play the part of the suffering servant of God,[1] whose portrait, drawn by the great Prophet of the Return, was ever present in the Master's mind; when, foreseeing the end, Jesus sought to warn his eager and confident disciples of what would surely ensue when they should go up to Jerusalem; is it to be wondered at that these disciples, impatient for the restoration "at this time" of the kingdom to Israel, were "amazed" and "afraid" and

[1] Isaiah, chaps. xlii., liii.

"perceived not the things that were said"? Is it to be wondered at that they often "reasoned among themselves of his words," and that, after such reasoning, he should be forced to ask sadly, "Do ye not yet perceive, neither understand?"[1]—nay that they should sometimes themselves record that they "understood not his sayings and were afraid to ask him"?[2]

And, these things being true, is it strange that misunderstandings and half-understandings should have been handed down with the vital truth of Jesus' teaching? No more strange—still it seems to me—than that these misunderstandings and half-understandings should, later, under the influence of "after-beliefs," have hardened into definite statements, explanatory of the apparent failure of the Messiah; and that these statements, still further hardened into dogma, should have come to form the chief part of that Catholic faith which is necessary before all things to be held "by whosoever will be saved."

[1] Mark viii., 17. [2] *Ibid.* ix., 32.

But oh, the pity of it!—that the religion founded by Jesus of Nazareth should, alone among the religions of the world, declare that salvation comes of orthodox belief; that it should declare that he can be the Saviour only of those who believe him to be the second person of a metaphysical Trinity! For God knows that we all need salvation,—a salvation that does not mean ultimate admittance to some impossible heaven, but that means safety here and now in the midst of the manifold temptations of this human life,—temptations of adversity and of prosperity, of joy and of sorrow, of the flesh and of the spirit. Such *practical* salvation is the mark of all true religion, and that religion is the truest which has most power unto such salvation. How then is it with Christianity? How great a practical salvation does it offer us? We know that the *Christian Religion* has put its main trust in orthodox belief, and orthodox observance, but how is it with the *Religion of Christ?*—with the religion which Jesus not only taught but lived, thus identifying it with a way of life?

In the midst of the difficulties and temptations and sorrows of life, still we cry,—What must we do to be saved? What answer is given to this eternal question by the Christian *way of life?*

VIII

THE WAY OF LIFE

"It is the spirit that quickeneth; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit and are life."—*The Gospel according to St. John.*

THE nature of the *way of life* taught by Jesus is not difficult of statement. It is the manifestation in daily living of certain definite estimates of the values of life, and of certain equally definite methods growing out of these estimates; and the Synoptic Gospels have furnished Christendom with a perfectly clear statement both of these estimates and these methods. Quite plainly Jesus taught his disciples saying:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

"Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth.

"Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.

"Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy.

"Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God.

"Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called sons of God.

"Blessed are they that have been persecuted for righteousness sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

How familiar the words are! So familiar that it requires a distinct effort of the mind to realise them as the expression of a definite point of view as to the values of life, as the definite opinion of this teacher as to what makes for human happiness.

And as it is with these familiar estimates, so it is with the equally familiar methods taught by the Master. We know them by heart, or, at least, by rote; know them so well that it is hard to think of them as practical suggestions toward dealing with the practical difficulties of human life.

Beware of all externalism, of all hypocrisy. Bear in mind that anger and lust are sins as truly as are murder and adultery; that defilement is from within and not without.

Be not anxious about the life of the body,

eager to accumulate possessions, for a man's real life consisteth not in the abundance of these things. It is the life of the soul that matters, and no man can truly serve two masters. He must chose between them, and peace comes of faithfulness to the right choice, of singlemindedness. Seek first that kingdom of heaven which is within you; and verily, if ye seek ye shall find, if ye ask ye shall receive.

But take heed that ye do not your righteousness that men may see it. Let your alms and your prayers and your fastings be known only to the Father which seeth in secret. Beware of pride, of self-satisfaction, of all hardness of spirit; judge not; consider the beam in thine own eye, not the mote in thy brother's. Be humble, glad to serve,—it is he that loseth his life, that spends it freely, that shall save it. Remember that evil cannot be overcome by evil; that it can be overcome only by good. Therefore resist it not; never be resentful, but forgive, if it be necessary, even to seventy times seven times—nay, love those who wrong you, since ye are the sons of that Father who

maketh His sun to rise on the evil and the good. For what is it to love them that love you? All men do this. But ye are to do more than others; ye shall be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Counsels of perfection indeed! Yet none the less a body of definite injunctions as to a possible way of life, a possible way of dealing with this puzzling and difficult business of daily existence; none the less a clear statement of a definite point of view as to what methods really make this strange human life of ours worth the living. One is tempted to paraphrase the familiar words only because this very familiarity has dulled our comprehension of them; but, in truth, the estimates and the methods taught by Jesus cannot be stated more clearly and simply than they are stated in Matthew and Mark and Luke.

No, the question to-day is not, What views did Jesus of Nazareth hold concerning the wise conduct of life? The question is rather, Are those views sound? Was he right in these estimates and methods? Did

he, in truth, find and point out the path of peace, the gate that leadeth unto life, or are his ethical teachings to be regarded as, in great measure, a dream of mere unpractical idealism? This is the question which is presenting itself more and more insistently to that large and growing class of "plain men," who, in the words of the editor of the *Hibbert Journal* (January, 1904), "want a more valid proof than has yet been offered that the world is serious when it professes a Christianity which is a life and not a creed"; of men who, having received the modern answer to the question, "What is Christianity"? are now, says the editor, asking the further question, "*Where* is this Christianity?"

Now, although many of these plain men may indeed feel that the Liberal Movement, "if it has diminished the intellectual contradiction, has increased the moral," and may therefore "look back, not perhaps without regret, to the easy times before science and criticism had dissipated their dogmatic conception of religion," the work of science and criticism none the less

remains, and such questionings can only be met, freely and frankly, by rational answers to rational objections. Let us then from a purely rational standpoint briefly consider certain aspects of this insistent problem of the relation of Christian ethics to modern civilisation.

It may be objected, then, that the attempt to live practically by the Sermon on the Mount assumes too much in assuming that the ethical precepts taught by a Jewish peasant to Jewish peasants are valid for the larger life of the great industrial world, bent on scientific and artistic achievement; a world whose advance in civilisation has been dependent on the instinct of self-preservation, and whose machinery is kept in running order by the principle of selfishness. Such an objection declares that it always has been, and is now, manifestly absurd to recommend indifference to material possessions to men who will not make use of hand and head without the prospect of such material reward; to urge non-resistance and the love of enemies upon human beings whose love of fighting is an inherited instinct, and who

have always been obliged to get their rights, as the phrase is, by force. It points out that the ethics of the New Testament are not only impracticable but undesirable, and that, in point of fact, Christian civilisation has always taken this view, preferring pagan to distinctively Christian virtues, and finding it wiser to worship Jesus as the Son of God than to follow him as the son of man ; that, in short, the *way of life* taught by Jesus was a "way" possible only among primitive conditions of existence, to those pure in heart and noble in purpose, but ignorant and simple-minded ; the creation of an enthusiast, of a dreamer ; a poem, which touches and stirs us, but which has little to do with the prose of daily life.

I am so far in sympathy with this objection as to agree that Jesus was, like all great spiritual leaders, a poet, and that he habitually employed the method of poetry,—the use of concrete images and of vivid and picturesque illustrations. There is always difficulty in any poetry for those who fail to bear this in mind, especially in religious and ethical poetry. For

average humanity is distrustful of poetry as a practical guide, and is always trying to turn it into prose. Here again crops up the old preference for the letter, the old difficulty of reaching through the letter to the spirit. And everything has helped to subject the poetic sayings and illustrations of Jesus to this literalising tendency. When Emerson bids us hitch our waggon to a star, we do not go and pick out our star ; we simply feel the inspiration of the thought expressed in this concrete image. But when Jesus bids us give our cloak to him who has stolen our coat, or turn the other cheek, or love our enemies, or limit our speech to yea and nay, or take no thought for the morrow, we find it curiously hard to believe that he means simply that it is the true way of life to be generous and unresentful and forgiving, to avoid over-speech, and to keep ourselves free from self-invented cares. And in this tendency to literalise his teaching I find the main cause of the objection to this teaching as impractical. For, to me, the spirit of Jesus, the spirit which took upon itself the

flesh of definite and vivid illustrations drawn from the life about him, wholly transcends these illustrations, and the limitations of the life that furnished them.

That Jesus was a Jewish peasant with slight knowledge of many of the interests of the great world, and indifferent to much that this world rightly valued; that social and industrial problems presented themselves to him in a very simple form, and that he was free from many of the special perplexities of modern civilisation is — to me — perfectly true. But the problem of human life remains essentially the same in all lands and all times. Human nature is dominated by the same passions, exposed to the same temptations, and, thank God, is filled by the same hunger and thirst after righteousness in the east and in the west, in the past and in the present. Still is justified the keen insight upon which the *principles* of Jesus' practical ethics were founded, and still their spirit quickeneth.

Take the two chief stumbling-blocks in the way of the reconciliation of these ethics with

the demands of modern civilisation—the attitude of Jesus toward wealth and toward war. I have no doubt that his thought on these two points was much influenced by the social and political conditions prevailing in Judæa about "the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Cæsar." I have no doubt that his distrust of wealth was increased by the circumstance that among his countrymen, under the Roman domination, a large fortune usually spelt extortion, a grinding of the faces of the poor. But has modern civilisation really changed all that? Have we really outgrown the need of Jesus' repeated warnings that Mammon is a master that requires faithful service and will accept no divided duty? Is it no longer true that the eager pursuit of material gain, and the dependence upon luxury, clog the soul of man, dulling our sight and hearing in the presence of the things that are more excellent? Are we no longer in danger of forgetting that a man's life does *not* consist in the abundance of the things which he possesseth? Or is it rather true that modern civilisation is steadily

demonstrating the essential truth of Jesus' teaching, demonstrating it through the very working out of its materialism? Only the other day the *Wall Street Journal*, speaking with *pity* of "the richest man in the world," asked, "Who would change places with him?" Is there no signification in that voice?

And as to that other stumbling-block—the stumbling-block of "non-resistance." Here, again, I have no doubt that Jesus' conviction that evil was not to be overcome by evil was strengthened by his consciousness of the seething spirit of revolt in the midst of which he lived and taught; of the suppressed rage, the fierce vindictiveness, that, smouldering in the heart of his people, blinded them to the uselessness of the attempt to restore the kingdom to Israel by open violence. That his keen intelligence foresaw the political doom hanging over this resentful nation is manifest. When the little company of wondering provincials exclaimed at the sight of Herod's great temple, "Master, behold, what manner of stones and

what manner of buildings!"[1] we know what answer he made. It was for the coming to Israel of another kingdom that he bade them labour. The word of the Lord of hosts came unto him as unto the older prophet, saying:

"O house of Judah, and house of Israel; so will I save you, and ye shall be a blessing; fear not, but let your hands be strong. . . . These are the things that ye shall do; speak ye every man the truth to his neghbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates: And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the Lord."[2]

Only by such methods, and not by the methods of hate and revenge and cruelty, might the true kingdom be restored unto Israel, might it come to pass that "out of all languages of the nations, men should take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you: for we have heard that God is with you."

Is it wise of the nations to-day to look upon such teaching as this as mere unpractical ideal-

[1] Mark xiii., 1, 2. [2] Zechariah viii., 13, 16, 17.

ism? Though I certainly believe that the critical state of Jewish national feeling in the time of Jesus led him to especial insistence on the danger of doing evil that good may come of it, have we proved that he was fundamentally mistaken in his conviction that there exists not only for individuals but for nations a higher law than that of "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth"?

As we look about to-day upon these nations armed to the teeth, glaring at one another over their bayonets and battle-ships, we may well question whether we rightly call our civilisation "Christian"—but look closer. We have been watching a terrible war indeed, but when has the world cried out against such destruction of innocent life with a like pity and horror? Is there no signification in the modern voices which are insisting that we are outgrowing the appeal to sheer physical force, not only as individuals, but as nations? In personal relationships we have surely learned that not through the methods of resentment shall the crooked be made straight and the rough places

plain, and are we not learning at last that the nation which shall be a blessing is the nation which shall indeed execute the judgment of truth and peace within its gates?

And this not because we are growing weaker, but because we are growing stronger; not because we set less value on the soldier's virtues; not because we are less thrilled by the spectacle of heroic devotion, of the brave heart and the strong hand; but because we are learning that the finest courage of all is that calm, self-reliant, unflinching courage, which lay back of the non-resistance of Jesus, the courage whose victories are those of peace. Never have the nations been better prepared for war; never have they so sincerely united in blessing the peacemaker.

It were easy to say more as to the relation of modern civilisation and the ethical teachings of Jesus. Let me rather call attention to the opinion on this point of a man whose character, endowments, and experience combined to place him at a point of view removed as far as possible from the point of view of a car-

penter of Nazareth in the last days of Jewish national existence. These are the words of Goethe in his eighty-second year :

" Let mental culture go on advancing, let science go on gaining in depth and breadth, and the human intellect expand as it may, it will never go beyond the elevation and moral culture of Christianity as it shines forth in the Gospels. The mischievous sectarianism of Protestants will one day cease, and with it the hatred between father and son, sister and brother, for as soon as the pure doctrine and love of Christ are comprehended in their true nature, and have became a living principle, we shall feel ourselves great and free as human beings, and not attach special importance to a degree more or less in the outward forms of religion. Besides, we shall all gradually advance from a Christianity of words and faith to a Christianity of feeling and action." [1]

"Yes," says the rationalist objector, " but, granting that the ethics of the New Testament are neither impracticable nor undesirable, that the human intellect will never go beyond the *moral* culture of Christianity as it shines forth in the Gospels, yet it remains true that the human intellect has gone far beyond the *intellectual* culture of the Gospels; that the conception of the universe and its laws common to Jesus and his disciples was not only unphilosophical, but in many respects so crude as to lead to serious error."

This is certainly true. It is quite obvious, for example, that Jesus shared the popular

[1] Lewes : *Life of Goethe.*

explanation of the evil in the world—that it was the work of a personal devil and his attendant demons. It was an explanation of the ancient and ever-present problem which the Jews seem to have brought back with them from the Exile, and which was certainly a great falling off philosophically from the standpoint of the noblest of their spiritual ancestors, a standpoint which finds expression in such words as these:

"I am the Lord, and there is none else, there is no God besides me: I girded thee, though thou hast not known me: That they may know from the rising of the sun, and from the west, that there is none besides me. I am the Lord and there is none else. I form the light and create darkness: I make peace, and create evil: I the Lord do all these things." [1]

That a terrible record of cruelty and suffering has to be directly charged against the Christian belief in the devil and in demoniacal possession cannot be denied. The Devil with a capital, and with horns, and hoofs, and tail, was pretty much master of ceremonies in the Middle Ages, and the horizon is still lurid with the reek of burning witches. And though

[1] Isaiah xlv., 5–7.

we have at length given up the exorcising of demons out of our fellow-men, the modern return to the philosophy of the Unknown Prophet has yet to exorcise the master of these demons out of the Christian creeds. Since, then, Jesus shared the unphilosophical notions of his time as to the origin of evil, and not only accepted demoniacal possession as the explanation of insanity and epilepsy and kindred nervous diseases, but was himself a most successful exorcist, why should we in the present stage of culture turn especially to him for light upon our spiritual path? Why not turn to other leaders whose intellectual and philosophical outlook was far wider?

Again I am in sympathy with this point of view in so far as I believe that to keep us in the right path we need all the help there is, all the help of philosophy, ancient and modern, and that some of the best help comes from pagan thinkers who did not consider that all the kingdoms of this world had been delivered to the devil, and to whom he choose to give them. But I believe, too, that some of the

best help comes from Christians who from time to time paused in their labours to throw an ink-stand at a tangible devil, and that the best help of all still comes from him who "by prayer" cast out demons too obstinate for his disciples.

Theories of the universe we must have, and by all means let them be as satisfying to the human intellect as we can make them, but still the help that we need most is a practical help, a help, that is, that has to do with practice and not with theory, with living and not with hypothetical explanations of life. When it comes to that, has our modern philosophy solved the problem of evil? Increased knowledge has destroyed many crude and inadequate hypotheses; has it given us any hypothesis more satisfying than that of the Unknown Prophet? Have we learned to understand these "wonderful things" since the day when God answered the Hebrew questioner out of the whirlwind, or do we even yet occasionally darken counsel by words without knowledge?

Jesus' hypothesis as to the origin of evil was certainly unphilosophical, but his method of dealing with evil remains the one method which has been substantiated by the whole experience of the world, pagan and Christian, wise and simple. His belief in demons gave unfortunate warrant for the demonology of *the Christian Religion*, but not to his account can be charged the method of blood and fire with which *the Christian Religion* sought to subdue and destroy demons. His method was stated very simply,—"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good."

Modern philosophy has done away with many unphilosophical ideas about evil—its origin and nature. Will it ever do away with this method of dealing with evil? And will it ever do away with the idea that lies back of it —the idea that power is with goodness and that we make this power ours if we ally ourselves with goodness, so that all things, apparent good and apparent evil, work together for good to them that love God? No,—in the twentieth as in the first century, the authority by which

Jesus commanded the unclean spirits is the one authority which unclean spirits obey. Here as everywhere he converted the idea into practical efficiency.

And is not this, in truth, what gives Jesus his unique place among the spiritual leaders of the world,—his power of turning the ideal into reality? If there is one fact adequately demonstrated by human experience it is that ideas are of genuine value to humanity only in so far as they are converted into life; that only that portion of our asserted beliefs "tell," which we actually live. Our *asserted* beliefs, I say, for it is obvious that we do live our real beliefs—though the admission is not a pleasant one to make. We may not be aware what argument our lives may have lent to our neighbour's creed, but we must recognise that this kind of argument is the only kind that really matters in the long run. Truth is mighty and shall prevail, but only by being made the *living* truth,—only in this form can it touch and arouse the heart of man, as well as convince his mind. We convert the invisible forces of nature into "power"

by visible appliances ; so we convert the invisible forces of ideas into power by visible deeds. More than this, most of us only comprehend ideas as we see them in action. As Mrs. Ward says in one of her books, " There is no approaching the idea for the masses except through the human life." This is a fact of universal experience, written large in the history of the world, written, on a smaller scale, in the hourly experience of every one of us, and it is this fact that gives to the Christian Gospels a preëminent place among the spiritual records of the world. Many a good and wise life, many a faithful and brave life has been lived upon this earth of ours, and let us be thankful from our souls for all that we know of such lives, but the world's literature holds no record of human existence so simple, so profound, so moving, as the story of the brief life and tragic death of Jesus of Nazareth. The Gospels are human documents, imperfect in many ways, but the impression of the personality with which they deal transcends these imperfections and for ever inspires the doubting

and struggling heart of humanity with the vision of what humanity may attain through the power of a living faith, of a faith, that is, that is lived.

Ah! here is the truth which we have constantly touched upon and with which we are at last face to face, the truth that the *power* of Jesus lay in his faith, in that profound and unshakable faith of which his *way of life* was the natural and inevitable expression. His ethical teaching was definite and unmistakable; there is no room for doubt as to his estimates and his methods, but these estimates and methods were not the results of a reasoned philosophy, of an ordered ethical system, they were the spontaneous flowering of a living faith. The *way of life* taught by the Christ was the religion of the Christ made visible, and if, believing that the words he has spoken unto us are indeed spirit and life, we seek humbly to enter into his way of living, we must first seek to enter into that faith of which this way of living was but the inevitable manifestation.

IX

THE RELIGION OF CHRIST

"I can of myself do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is righteous; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of him that sent me. . . . If I do not the works of my Father believe me not. But if I do them, though ye believe not me, believe the works: that ye may know and understand that the Father is in me and I in the Father."—*The Gospel according to St. John.*

THE *Religion of Christ*, the faith of Jesus, —we are at the heart of Christianity now. "What we call Christianity," says Amiel, "is a vast ocean into which flow a number of spiritual currents of distant and various origin. What is specific in it is Jesus, *the religious consciousness of Jesus.*"

The words are profoundly true, and the exponents of liberal orthodoxy to-day who are insisting that Christianity is something more than an ethical code have firm ground under their feet. They are surely right when they point out that the rationalism which would reduce

Christianity to such a code in reality does away with Christianity altogether, since the code itself is but the flower of Jewish ethical culture. What vitalises this code, what gives it its inspiring and energising power, is Jesus himself, "the religious consciousness of Jesus."

And here we find ourselves at the crucial point of controversy, to-day, between the "New Theology," and "natural religion." That most liberal of orthodox liberals, Dr. Lyman Abbott, may, I suppose, be taken as a fair exponent of this "New Theology." He tells us that the message of the Christian Church is this: that God "has revealed Himself to us by coming into human life and interpreting Himself to us in the terms of a human experience," and that this message "is the secret of the power which the Evangelical churches possess, and which no naturalistic philosophy or mere ethical teaching can ever rival. It is our faith in this message," goes on Dr. Abbott, "which makes us suspicious of all philosophies which seem to eliminate the supernatural from the world. It is because this is our mes-

sage that we insist upon what are commonly called the great Cardinal Doctrines of the Evangelical faith, such as Inspiration, Incarnation, Atonement, and Regeneration. This is not because we are enamoured of a particular system of theology; it is because our message to the world is like that of Jacob to himself when he woke from his dream: 'Surely the Lord is in this place; and I knew it not.' " [1]

Therefore to even the newest orthodoxy, the orthodoxy least "enamoured of a particular system of theology," Jesus remains a "supernatural" being, and the exponents of this new orthodoxy frequently add, that unless he was a supernatural being, his self-assertion can only be accounted for as the expression of "supreme egotism."

But what is the "supernatural"? What, in this year of our Lord nineteen hundred and five, do we mean by the word? Do we mean by it a something outside of nature which manifests itself, arbitrarily, in opposition to those universal laws of nature of whose profound

[1] Lyman Abbott: *The Christian Ministry*, chap. i.

and subtle workings we have but a growing revelation; or do we mean that in the working of these laws we are conscious—increasingly conscious, as I believe—of a force, that, acting through these laws, "makes for righteousness," a force which we call Divine because we feel that it is not human, which we call Infinite, because we feel that it is not finite? Before one can answer whether or not his philosophy "would eliminate the supernatural from the world" he must understand what is meant by the supernatural, and to a philosophy which finds in the natural a *constant* revelation of the supernatural, the whole controversy as to the nature of Jesus must seem largely a controversy of words and phrases; and this whether we say with Dr. Abbott that God "has revealed Himself to us by coming into human life and interpreting Himself to us in the terms of a human experience," or whether we say with Dr. Martineau that "the union of the two natures in Christ resolves itself into their union in man, and links Heaven and Earth in relations of common spirituality." Believing as I

personally do that Jesus of Nazareth was "a man in all things made like unto his brethren," I yet find myself in perfect sympathy with Dr. Abbott's definition of Christianity, founded upon Max Müller's definition of religion, as "such a perception of the Infinite as manifested in the life and character of Jesus Christ that the perception is able to produce in man Christlikeness of life and character."

As for the "self-assertion" of Jesus, putting aside the fact, always to be borne in mind, that we know his actual words only through the medium of a half-century's tradition, founded on the reports of those who loved and reverenced, but who frequently "did not understand," is *such* self-assertion really the mark of "supreme egotism"? Is it not rather the mark of all profound and passionate conviction? It is in the certainty of the faith of Jesus that I find the explanation of his so-called self-assertion. He refuses the title of "good master,"—"Why callest thou me good? None is good save one, even God,"[1]—but he knew that the things

[1] Mark x., 18.

which he taught had been delivered unto him of his Father, since he had "received not the spirit of the world but the spirit which is of God, that he might know the things which are freely given to us by God."[1] He who has received "the spirit which is of God," and who feels himself to have received it, must always be open to the charge of self-assertion and of egotism, for, though he who speaks against the Son of man may be forgiven, it is hard indeed to forgive him who speaks against the Holy Spirit. It was the certainty of the faith of Jesus, his sense of spiritual power in the *certainty* that God was with him, that, as I believe, led him to respond at last to the eager craving of his people for a deliverer, and in those critical hours at Cæsarea Philippi, to accept the terrible responsibility of the Messiahship, and to steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem, not indeed as a lamb led to the slaughter, but as a great soul upon whom the Spirit of the Lord had descended, anointing him, making of him a Christ, that he might

[1] 1 Cor. ii., 12.

not only preach good tidings unto the meek, the broken-hearted, and the captive, but that he might denounce unsparingly false religion with its hypocrisy and bigotry and cruelty, and, facing with level eyes the rage of those by whom he was despised and rejected, pour out his soul unto death and live for ever, not as the Messiah of the Jews, but as the Christ of God, "in whose life and character" the Infinite was so manifested, that the perception is able to produce in man Christlikeness of life and character."

Surely he hath borne our griefs and carried our sorrows, the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. The religious consciousness of Jesus made of the heaviest responsibility ever assumed by man, a yoke that was easy and a burden that was light,—here lay his salvation, and if we might learn of him to share in this religious consciousness, if we might, through communion with this life and character, enter into the *Religion of Christ*, would it not also prove our salvation?

We are weak, dragged down by animal instincts and impulses; helpless, often, before the sins which do so easily beset us: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that kept him, not only pure in deed, but pure in heart; that gave him power, alike in the fields of Galilee and the streets of Jerusalem, to answer, "Get thee behind me, Satan," and that brought angels to minister unto him.

We are selfish, lovers of ease, concerned for personal comfort: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that held him tranquil when he knew not where to lay his head, and that made him gladly spend his life not to be ministered unto but to minister.

We are troubled about many things, anxious for the "necessaries" of life,—who can define them?—eager for *possessions*: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that kept him free from the clutch of material things, that held him peacefully assured that even food and raiment are but things to be added unto the true life—the life that does not consist in abundance of possessions.

We are despondent, morose, afraid to be glad: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that led him to rejoice in the beauty of the world, in the growing corn, in the flower of the field, in the bird of the air; and that made him no less welcome at the feast than in the house of mourning.

We are hampered at every turn by conventions, concerned for the outside of the platter, constantly accepting estimates which we know to be false: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that held ever clearly before him the true values of life; that made him equally at ease, equally the master, in the house of the Pharisee and of the Publican, with the rich and with the poor; that made him the lover of little children and of the simple-hearted who can receive the kingdom as a little child.

We are dull of sight, blind to what is not upon the surface, given to miserable misunderstandings; it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that gave him a quick and sure insight into the hearts of men and women, that taught him what was in man; so that the common

people heard him gladly and all the city was gathered together at his door.

We are bitter, unforgiving, ungenerous, scrupulous in exacting penalties: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that enabled him to forgive all things, because "they know not what they do."

We are cowardly, afraid of suffering, physical and mental, afraid of the responsibilities of life, afraid, continually, of what may happen: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that rendered him absolutely fearless, capable of defying, without hesitation, a religious conservatism bitterly intolerant and vindicative; and that carried him from one danger to another, with a courage, quiet, steady, magnificent, until in the heart-breaking record of the last days we behold, "the incomparable hero of the Passion."

And what of faith and hope and love in the *Religion of Christ?*

Of faith? We are full of doubt, uncertain, wavering, like the surge of the sea driven by the wind and tossed: it was the religious con-

sciousness of Jesus that made him live his life in the unfailing assurance that the Son of man was the Son of God and that the Father's hand was leading him; which made it possible for him to accept the cup of bitter humiliation and apparent defeat as from that Father's hand, and in the hour of mortal agony still to pray the prayer of his life,—"nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt."

With hope? We are despondent, easily disheartened, easily hopeless of better things: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that led him to bid his disciples be "never despairing," since they were "sons of the Most High," and that gave him undying hope in the possibilities of human nature.

And, finally, with love, — the greatest of these? We are cold, indifferent, unsympathetic: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that filled him with a compassion so profound, so tender, so mighty, that the very sound of his voice, and touch of his hand, brought healing to the sick in body and in mind. We are narrow in judgment, self-righteous,

unloving: it was the religious consciousness of Jesus that revealed to him that justification lay rather in the softened humility of the publican than in the hard pride of the Pharisee; that made him very gentle to the sinner that repenteth; that enabled him to strengthen the weak knees, to lift the fallen, even to make it possible, through the power of redeeming love, for the sinner to go and sin no more. And therefore was it that these sinners drew near unto him for to hear him.

It was, in brief, the religious consciousness of Jesus, that made his life so full of privation, discouragement and suffering, the life that, whatever may be our creed, we all know in our heart was the life preëminently worth living. It was a life so humble, so obscure, despised as much by the contempt of the Roman as rejected by the hate of the Jew, that we can find no certain record of it in the great world's history, yet a life of which nineteen centuries have echoed the words of the centurion, — "Truly this man was the Son of God!" And still the Christian world

repeats the words, still it offers them as an answer to that still older cry, "Who will show us any good?" Have they proved an unreal and inadequate answer? Indeed I do not believe this. Still the life in which was incarnate the idea of the redeeming power of love remains the light of men. But I do believe that we may hope to share, in some measure, its patience and wisdom and courage, its faith and hope and love, not through the outward salvation of *the Christian Religion*,—the salvation of a creed, but through the inward salvation of the religious consciousness of Jesus, of the *Religion of Christ*.

But here we must listen once more to the objector,—still the rationalist objector, though on this point he will receive strong support from the dogmatist. Granting that the *way of life* which Jesus taught was the ideal way, and that he made it real through the power of his religious consciousness, how does this help the most of us who are crawling between heaven and earth? We say, Behold what this man's religious consciousness made possible

for him,—let us then commit ourselves to his faithfulness and seek to share in this religious consciousness. As well might we say, Behold what the genius of Beethoven and Raphael and Shakespeare made possible for them,—let us then share their genius. For as truly as it was *given* to Beethoven to hear symphonies, and to Raphael to paint pictures, and to Shakespeare to write poems, so truly was it *given* to Jesus always to behold the face of his Father in heaven,—"for this also is a gift." Jesus was a religious genius; how may average humanity share in genius?

So the objector;—and I must assuredly agree that average humanity can no more create what Jesus created than it can create a *Ninth Symphony* or a *Sistine Madonna* or a *Macbeth*. Nevertheless average humanity is not shut out from sharing the gifts of its elect. That degree of creative power which we call genius is possessed by the few only, but what is the meaning of the thrill with which the many look and listen, with which average humanity responds to all created beauty? Surely

it is because in spite of the infinite variety of human temperament and endowment, "the same heart beats in every human breast." We are very sure of our right to share in the æsthetic and intellectual treasures of humanity, and we know well that our capacity for such sharing depends largely upon ourselves, upon the degree of our "culture"; why are we so slow to see that this is true also of spiritual treasure? that here, too, it is largely a matter of culture? We are ready to take infinite trouble to lift ourselves to the level of the symphony or the picture or the poem; why do we make so little effort to lift ourselves to a higher spiritual level?

In very truth it sometimes seems as if the conviction that we must *be* saved, that salvation is something to be done for us from without, had resulted in a sort of spiritual palsy so that we lie paralysed, and only by the helping hands of some deep experience, a great joy, or a yet mightier sorrow, can be borne into the healing presence of a power which bids us rise and stand erect and go our way, returning thanks to God. But often our difficulty is

rather spiritual indolence than disease. So long as we read the New Testament conventionally, artificially, with no sense of its reality, we shall surely not *feel* to the full the quickening power of *the Religion of Christ;* and circumstances have brought it about that, for most of us, it is by no means easy to read the New Testament *not* conventionally. To put aside the veil which *the Christian Religion* has put upon *the Religion of Christ*, we need all the help we can get, not only from without but from within. For even now when scholarship has done so much to lift the veil, "he who does not give himself to the labour of *interpretation* and *assimilation* in reading the Gospel,—he who does not penetrate through the letter and the form to the inspiration and the inmost consciousness of the Master,—cannot understand and profit by his teaching."[1]

"For to go along that road," says St. Augustine, "aye, and to reach the goal, is all one with the will to go; but it must be a strong and single will, not a broken-winged wish fluttering

[1] Sabatier, *The Religions of Authority.*

hither and thither, rising with one pinion, struggling and falling with the other," for, as ever, "according to our *purpose*, shall be the success of our spiritual profiting."

But if the will be strong and single, if we do give ourselves to the labour of interpretation and assimilation, the reward is sure. For no gift is so freely shared as the religious gift, no giver is so generous as the giver of the things of the spirit. If we touch but the border of his garment power comes forth from him to heal us, and by his faith are we made whole and go in peace.

Wearied by cant phrases, sickened by cheap emotion, one almost hesitates to speak of the love of Jesus, yet still and for ever "blessed is he that understands what it is to love Jesus, —to love him and keep him for his friend." [1]

So cried the monk of the Middle Ages, and still is heard the cry.

"O thou great friend to all the sons of men,
Who once appeared in humblest guise below,
Sin to rebuke, to break the captive's chain,
And call thy brethren forth from want and woe!

[1] Thomas à Kempis.

We look to thee: thy truth is still the light
  Which guides the nations groping on their way,
Stumbling and falling in disastrous night,
  Yet hoping ever for the perfect day.

Yes, thou art still the Life; thou art the Way
  The holiest know,—Light, Life, and Way of heaven;
And they who dearest hope and deepest pray,
  Toil by the light, life, way which thou hast given." [1]

[1] Theodore Parker.

X

CONCLUSION

"And it came to pass . . . that the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch."—*The Acts of the Apostles.*

BUT who wrote the lines at the end of the preceding chapter? An infidel—yes, an infidel. So at least the whole Christian Church, orthodox and heterodox, with rare unanimity declared him. He was, they said, an unbeliever, unfaithful to *the Christian Religion.* Was he also unfaithful to *the Religion of Christ?*

And this brings us to the facing of objections in the way of any effort toward substituting the salvation of *the Religion of Christ* for the salvation of *the Christian Religion* of a nature altogether different from those we have been considering,—the objections of the dogmatist. And it is quite obvious that I

cannot hope to meet these objections in any such way as that in which I have tried to meet those of the rationalist,—that, in truth, I cannot hope to meet them at all. For it is evident that the considerations which satisfy me will not satisfy the dogmatist, and there is an end of the matter.

"For see," says the dogmatist, "you talk of substituting for *the Christian Religion* something which you, following Lessing, call foolishly, and somewhat blasphemously, *the Religion of Christ*, unheeding the fact that by so doing you take away all *authority* for any religion whatever. For when you declare the Church to be a purely human institution, and the Bible to be a collection of purely human documents, and Jesus to have been a man as we are, what authority have you left for your so-called *Religion of Christ?* If Jesus had no knowledge of the counsels of God beyond what is possible to humanity, then his faith had no more authority than the faith of other prophets and seers. And if the record of his teaching was protected by no miracle from hu-

man error and misrepresentation, how can we be sure what his faith and his teaching really were? The individual soul is left free not only to find out *the Religion of Christ* for itself, but to discriminate in regard to the received teaching of the Master as it would discriminate in regard to the received teaching of Socrates or Epictetus or Augustine or à Kempis, on the assumption that its authority is relative and not absolute. So that, for a revelation of God's own truth, warranted, as it were, by supernatural manifestations, you would substitute a mere faith in God and an ethical code and call it *the Religion of Christ.*"

So the dogmatist. And I can only answer —even so. For I do find no ultimate authority for religion except in the soul of man, in the internal witness, *speaking in the religious experience of mankind.* This, rather than a supernatural pronouncement warranted by miracle, *is* "revealed religion" to me—as it was to James Martineau. And I believe that it is by this revelation that all teaching must be tried, and that what we are to seek from

all teaching is an inspiration that we can make our own, not an authority that we may blindly obey.

But the dogmatist will find only arrogance and license in this answer, and will go on to say:

"Moreover in doing away with the special authority of Jesus, you do away with the value of his assurances that man is immortal. How could he know? More than this: by regarding the stories of the resurrection, as well as the stories of the birth, as poetic legends created by hope and faith and love, you do away with all *proof* of immortality, a proof which has been the main strength of *the Christian Religion* from the days of St. Paul on, and leave us to exclaim with him that 'if Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain,' nay—'our faith also is vain!'"

If I answer the dogmatist that I, too, believe that Jesus "had the words of eternal life"; this answer will not satisfy him at all, and with reason, for what I mean by eternal life is not what he means. He means a future life with a heaven for the saints wherein they

shall "attain to everlasting felicity," and a hell for the sinners wherein they shall be subjected "to most grievous torments in soul and body, without intermission, in Hell-fire, for ever": and I mean what Amiel means when he says, "The eternal life is not the future life; it is life in harmony with the true order of things, —life in God."

And if I say that it seems to me that this is what Jesus also meant by "eternal life," the dogmatist will scout me. Certainly Jesus did share in the Pharisee's belief in a future life with a heaven and a hell. His "Gehenna," however, seems to have been the objective point of the scribe and the Pharisee rather than of the sinner; and his heaven was certainly a present one. Whether we translate his most sublime saying, "The kingdom of heaven is within you," or "The kingdom of heaven is in the midst of you," the meaning is the same so far as time is concerned. When the scribe asked him what he must do to inherit eternal life, we know what was Jesus' answer, and how the scribe, surprised and

touched out of his intention to entrap the teacher, exclaimed, "Of a truth, Master, thou hast well said." "And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."

Still to me he who loves God and man is not far from the kingdom of God, and may trust the Father for his inheritance; still to me the commandment of God *is* life eternal, and he that believeth *hath* eternal life; and still I believe that through such lives as those of Jesus and his faithful disciples in all ages "is opened to us the gate of everlasting life." And here there comes into my mind what was said by St. Augustine and his mother as they talked of "that life which never comes to be, but is, as it was and shall be evermore, because in it is neither past nor future but present only, for it is eternal; for past and future are not eternal."

"We said then: If the tumult of the flesh were hushed; hushed these shadows of earth, sea, sky; hushed the heavens and the soul itself, so that it should pass beyond itself and not think of itself; if all dreams were hushed, and all sensuous revelations, and every tongue and every

symbol; if all that comes and goes were hushed—They all proclaim to him that hath an ear: 'We made not ourselves: He made us who abideth for ever'—But suppose that, having delivered their message, they held their peace, turning their ear to Him who made them, and that He alone spoke, not by them, but for Himself, and that we heard His word, not by any fleshly tongue, nor by an angel's voice, nor in the thunder, nor in any similitude, but His voice whom we love in these His creatures.—Suppose we heard him without any intermediary at all—Just now we reached out, and with one flash of thought touched the Eternal Wisdom that abides above all—Suppose this endured, and all other far inferior modes of vision were taken away, and this alone were to ravish the beholder, and absorb him, and plunge him in mystic joy, might not eternal life be like this moment of comprehension for which we sighed? Is not this the meaning of 'Enter thou into the joy of thy Lord'?"[1]

But I know well that such "mysticism" as this will seem to the dogmatist but a poor substitute for the accredited evidence of witnesses that several days after death they saw and touched a resuscitated body; that "Christ did truly rise again from death, and took again his body, with flesh, bones, and all things appertaining to the perfection of man's nature,

[1] *Confessions*, book ix., chap. x.

wherewith he ascended into heaven and there sitteth, until he return to judge all men at the last day."

"No," the dogmatist will say, "Christianity is more, far more, than a mystical faith and a moral code; it is a body of doctrine founded on sufficing evidence, not only intellectual but sensuous; and entrenched in a divinely guided ecclesiastical organisation, furnished with sacred and sacramental rites. And only because it is this, has it any warrant to teach a way of life—as an adjunct. And since this is so, no one who does not accept this body of doctrine, or, at least, the authority of the instrument of salvation which guards this body of doctrine, has any right whatever to claim the name of Christian. I am sorry," says this kindly dogmatist, "but whatever such an one may be, he is *not* a Christian."

Well, the dogmatist may be right. It may be that the name Christian should be the exclusive possession of the professors of *the Christian Religion*. This does not seem unreasonable. It is a name grown dear to us all

through long association, but, after all, it is only a name, and one unfamiliar to the ears of Jesus. It was in Antioch, as we know, that the disciples were first called Christians. And those of us who may not be called Christians may none the less earnestly and humbly seek to be disciples. For none the less remains to us the record of that life lived long ago in the Syrian land; none the less may we turn for inspiration to that brave and beautiful spirit to whom the love of God and the love of man gave the power to understand, to console, to uplift, to strengthen, not alone the years, but the centuries; not alone a little band of wandering disciples, but the great multitude that labour and are heavy laden; none the less may we find renewed faith and hope and love for all humanity in the faith and hope and love of this noblest of the world's Christs, the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth in Galilee, Son indeed of the living God.

And none the less, *O Thou Father of all the brethren of thy Christ*, may we, through

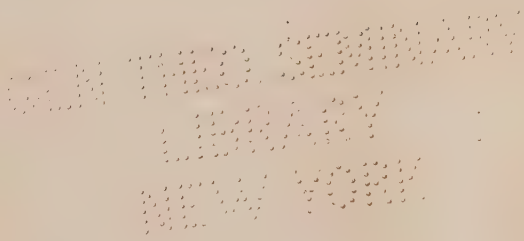
communion with this pure and true and noble life, lift up our hearts to Thee, in whom do we put our trust, in whose light shall we see light, in knowledge of whom standeth our eternal life, whose service is perfect freedom.

The Christian Religion has been tried for eighteen centuries and the Religion of Christ remains to be tried. It may seem rather "extravagant," this saying, but is it not true that it does "express the spirit in which any new movement for the improvement of theology must be carried on"? And is it not also true that the twentieth century is, in reality, seeking, as no century has ever sought before, to *try* the *Religion of Christ*—to prove it and test it; that it is laying a steadily decreasing emphasis upon dogma and ritual, a steadily increasing emphasis upon a way of life? Such, at least, is the unmistakable signification of many of the new voices. And mingling with these new voices, strengthening and sustaining them, come many older voices out of the centuries that have gone, and among them,

from the far past, from the very dawn of Christianity, comes this voice:

"*And he gave some to be apostles; and some prophets; and some evangelists; and some pastors and teachers; for the perfecting of the saints, unto the work of ministering, unto the building up of the body of Christ: till we all attain unto the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a full-grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ: that we may be no longer children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, in craftiness, after the wiles of error; but speaking truth in love, may grow up in all things unto him which is the head, even Christ.*

"*I, therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beseech you to walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; giving diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, even as also ye were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all, and through all, and in all.*"



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